In-Patient Radioactive Iodine (\(^{131}\text{I}\)) Treatment

Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to learn:

• what radioactive iodine treatment is
• what to expect
• instructions to follow during your treatment
• instructions to follow after you return home

What is radioactive iodine treatment?

Your doctor has recommended radioactive iodine (\(^{131}\text{I}\)) to treat your thyroid cancer. Radioactive iodine is a material that gives off energy. It goes to your thyroid gland area and is absorbed by thyroid tissue. It destroys thyroid cancer cells and any remaining normal thyroid cells.

For females: You must not be pregnant during radioactive iodine treatment. If there is a chance you could be pregnant, a pregnancy test will be done before we give you radioactive iodine.

If you are breastfeeding, you will have to stop after your treatment. You will be able to breastfeed any other children you may have in the future.
What can I expect?

You will need to stay in the hospital during this treatment. You can expect to be in the hospital for 2 to 3 days. When you can go home depends on how quickly your body eliminates (gets rid of) the radioactive iodine.

In the hospital, a doctor will give you radioactive iodine capsules (pills) to swallow. Your body will slowly eliminate the radioactive iodine through body fluids such as your saliva, sweat and urine. As this happens, things you touch or people that come near you will be exposed to radioactive iodine, which is unsafe.

After taking the capsules, you will need to follow special instructions. These instructions will help keep others safe and reduce radioactive exposure to your hospital room.

What should I bring to the hospital?

You will have to throw away anything you bring to the hospital and use during your treatment. So, only bring items that you need but can throw away.

☑ Bring just enough toothpaste, soap or shampoo. After your treatment, you will have to throw away the toothbrush or hair comb you bring.

☑ Bring enough of your regular medicines, if you are taking any.

☑ Bring old socks or old slippers to wear during your treatment (they will have to be thrown away after). The hospital can also provide you with slippers to wear.

☑ Clothes you will wear when you can go home can stay in the hospital room closet. They will be safe to wear unless you touch them after your treatment begins.

☑ Bring hard sour candies to suck on during your stay. Don’t bring chewing gum.

☑ You may bring bottled water and snacks such as chips to eat the day after you receive the iodine.
- If you want to read during your stay, bring magazines that you can leave behind.

If you bring a book that you want to take home after your treatment, you must wear gloves when you touch it. We can provide the gloves. **Don’t bring library books.**

- Telephones and TVs are available in your hospital room (you will have to pay extra to use them). Please don’t bring any other electronic devices with you. If you must, you will need to wear gloves or put them in a plastic bag while you use them. Touch screens may not work properly.

### What happens when I come to the hospital?

- On the day you are admitted, come to the in-patient unit 18B at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. A nurse will show you around the floor and your room. Your nurse will also answer any questions that you have.

- You will have a blood test to check your thyroid function and thyroglobulin level.

- You will get the telephone number of the nursing station. It will be marked on your room telephone and written on the white board in your room.

- We will post a radiation warning sign on the outside of your door after you have started your treatment. Personal or hospital items that go into your room must stay there for the entire time you are receiving treatment.

- For safety reasons, your nurse will spend very little time in your room once you have started your treatment. You can still speak with your nurse by telephone. Your nurse will also check on you often to see how you are doing.

Let your nurse know if you have any questions or concerns. Call your nurse if you need things like another hospital gown, more towels or more ice water.
What about visitors?

Visitors are not allowed during your treatment and hospital stay. Let your family and friends know they can call you by phone.

How will I feel after I begin treatment?

Most patients do not feel anything unusual. You may experience mild swelling or soreness in your neck or jaw areas. You may have some nausea or a change in your ability to taste food.

These side effects go away with time. Contact your nurse if you vomit or are worried about any symptom, especially difficulty breathing or neck tightness. Use the call bell if you need to speak to your nurse immediately.

What about food?

- After you are admitted, you will receive a low iodine meal for lunch. **Don’t eat it until at least 1 hour after you have been given the radioactive iodine.** You can resume a regular diet by dinner.

- You will receive your meals on disposable dishes. Throw away your dishes when you are done. Place the used trays in the area of your room you were told to put them.

- Starting at least 1 hour after you have swallowed the radioactive iodine you should drink plenty of fluids and empty your bladder often.

- The day after you have been given the radioactive iodine, you can start to suck on the sour candies (if you brought some).
Important instructions to follow during your treatment:

• Do as much of your own personal care as possible. If you need help, please call your nurse.

• Wear a hospital gown during your entire stay.

• Wear old socks or hospital slippers when out of bed. **Don’t walk barefoot at any time.**

• Wash your hands often.

• To prevent splashing, male patients must sit when emptying their bladders (urinating). This will keep the surrounding area safe from radioactive iodine.

• **Flush the toilet 3 times after each use.**

• Shower and wash your hair twice a day. This will help to remove the radiation that comes out of your body through sweat. We will provide you with extra towels. Change your gown after each shower.

• Change your bed linen once a day, starting on your second day. Place all soiled linens in the containers provided.

• Having bowel movements often is important. We will provide you with a mild laxative on your first night. If you don’t have a bowel movement within 24 hours of receiving the iodine capsules, contact your nurse.

• Put any solid waste (garbage) in the grey waste plastic bag.

• **Don’t pour any liquids into the waste plastic bag. Flush liquids down the toilet or pour them into the washroom sink.**

• **Don’t leave the room at any time, except if there is an emergency.**
When can I go home?

A Nuclear Medicine Technologist or Radiation Safety Officer will check your radiation level during your treatment. When the radiation level is low enough to be safe, you will be ready to go home.

Before you leave the hospital your nurse or doctor will give you instructions about your thyroid hormone medicine and a follow-up appointment. The Radiation Safety Officer will also give you an appointment for a whole body scan. This appointment is usually about 10 days after your treatment.

When you get home, there are special instructions to follow to keep others safe from radiation exposure.

⚠️ Important instructions to follow when you get home:

For 7 days after your therapy:

- Drink lots of fluids to avoid constipation.
- Flush the toilet twice after each use, and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Males should sit on the toilet when urinating.
- Wash the cutlery, glasses and dishes you use separately. **Don’t use disposable plates and cutlery.**
- Separate your linen, bath towels, face cloths and clothing from the rest of your family's. Wash these items separately.
- Sleep alone, not with your partner or children.
- Don’t have sex.
- Stay about 1 meter (3 feet) away from others, especially pregnant women and children under 12 years old.
After 7 days:

- You may have sex after 1 week, but use proper birth control.
- For women, don’t become pregnant for 6 months after radioactive iodine treatment. For men, don’t father a child for 2 months after treatment. You may want to talk to your family doctor about appropriate birth control.

Are there any side effects?

Your mouth may become dry. This is very rare if you’ve only had one treatment. It’s more common if you’ve had repeated treatments.

Constant dryness of your mouth can lead to dental problems such as tooth decay (cavities), especially if you had problems with this before. Good dental care after your treatment is important. We may refer you to the dental department for advice before your iodine treatment.

If your mouth becomes inflamed (red, irritated) or swollen after treatment, you can continue to suck hard sour candies or lemon wedges.

If your salivary glands or tear ducts become frequently or constantly inflamed after treatment, contact your doctor.

If you develop shortness of breath or have difficulty breathing, go to your nearest emergency department.