

Arden Cancer Centre

Information for patients prior to Thyroid Ablation Therapy

Introduction

As part of your treatment plan your doctor has recommended radio-iodine treatment. This leaflet aims to answer any questions you may have.

Please read this information and contact us with any further questions that you may have. A contact number is given at the end of this leaflet.

Consent forms

Before you undergo this procedure you will be required to sign a consent form which shows that your doctor has explained the treatment procedure and any possible side effects to you.

Radio-iodine

What is Radio-iodine?

Radio-iodine is a form of iodine which gives off radiation.

What does Radio-iodine do?

Radio-iodine concentrates in your thyroid gland and reduces the activity of the gland over a period of time.

How long will Radio-iodine stay in my body?

The radio-iodine is taken up by your thyroid gland within a few hours. Any remaining radio-iodine will gradually disappear from your body, mainly passed in the urine. Very small amounts leave in saliva, blood, perspiration and faeces.

Is the radioactivity treatment safe?

Over the years treatment has been given to many patients and it has been shown to be both safe and effective. The rest of your body, apart from the thyroid receives a small radiation dose, similar to having a medical X-ray taken.

Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

If you could be pregnant or are breast feeding your infant, it is very important that you let the medical staff know as soon as possible, as this will affect the treatment.



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If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant the treatment must be delayed.

If you are breast feeding, you must stop completely 8 weeks before having treatment and not resume breast feeding for that child. You may resume breast feeding with the birth of another child. These precautions are to protect your child.

Your treatment

The treatment is usually given as a capsule swallowed with water.

Before the treatment

Because you have been prescribed radioactive iodine treatment for your thyroid gland, your doctor will have advised you to **either** stop taking your thyroid medication for several weeks before the ablation treatment **or** to have thyrogen injections to stimulate any remaining thyroid tissue just prior to the treatment. You will have been asked to follow a low iodine diet for a week and you should have no procedures with iodinated contrast in the three months prior to your treatment. This includes X-rays or CT scans with iodine contrast.

The treatment itself is simple and should cause no discomfort. It consists of nothing more than swallowing a small capsule containing the iodine, together with a little water. However, it will be necessary for you to be admitted to hospital to receive this treatment, which is likely to be given on a Tuesday, Thursday or Friday. You will be given a single bedded room with your own toilet and shower room.

Before your treatment there may be some investigations carried out by your doctors. There is no special preparation on the day of treatment.

Women of child bearing age

Women of child bearing age will be asked to confirm that there is no possibility that they may be pregnant or breastfeeding, and they are advised to take effective contraceptive precautions for **six months** following administration of radioactive iodine.

Men of reproductive capacity

Men are advised to take effective contraceptive precautions for **four months** following administration of radioactive iodine.

Medication and tablets

You will receive some instructions regarding the tablets you are currently taking with your appointment letter.

It is important that you bring any other tablets or medicines you are taking to the attention of your doctors to make sure you can continue taking them whilst you receive the iodine treatment.

It is best to avoid cough medicines, "health" foods and fish before treatment as these contain iodine. (See patient information leaflet entitled 'Dietary advice for people having high dose radioactive iodine: a two week low iodine diet.')

Some drugs such as Amiodarone also affect iodine uptake and should be avoided before treatment.

Immediately following treatment

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From the day you receive your capsule you will not be able to leave your room. We recommend that you do not have visitors, but if this is necessary, they must **not** visit during the first 24 hours. After this they must not stay for more than half an hour per day and must follow all instructions given to them by nursing staff. This includes staying near the door of the room with you by the bed. **Small children and pregnant women will not be allowed to visit you.**

Before the capsule is given Nuclear Medicine staff will discuss how long you will have to stay in hospital, which will be dependant on the dose prescribed but is not likely to exceed four days. Before being discharged you will be visited by Nuclear Medicine staff who will check that it is safe for you to go home. They will also check all the items of clothing and other possessions that you have brought into hospital with you. If they have been contaminated by the iodine, which is quite possible, it will be necessary for you to leave them behind. They will be kept safely and be made available for your collection after a period of two to three months. Therefore you are advised to bear this in mind when you decide what to bring into hospital with you.

During the time that you are on the ward you are asked to be particularly careful when using the toilet, to avoid splash. Male patients especially are requested to use the toilet seated when passing urine.

Precautions when you leave the Hospital

When clearance has been given for you to go home you will be requested to take certain precautions for some days after leaving hospital. The number of days for which these precautions will apply depends upon the level of radioactivity in you when you leave hospital and you will be given full details at that time.

Why are the precautions necessary?

When you receive radio-iodine, the iodine concentrates in your thyroid gland and means that, while the radio-iodine is concentrated there, you are giving off a small amount of radiation. This means that you have to observe some precautions for a short while until the amount of radioactivity has fallen to a low level. This is to protect other people, especially your own family, young children and women who might be pregnant.

Radiation Information Card

When you leave the hospital you will be given a 'Radiation Information Card'. You will be asked to carry this card with you at all times until the date indicated on the card (three to four weeks after your treatment). This card alerts those who may deal with you (for example in the event of unforeseen illness) that you have had a radio-iodine treatment. The card also contains a summary of the precautions we will ask you to follow, and the exact date up to which these precautions apply.

Travelling home

- **You can travel home alone, driving or walking.**
- You may travel by private car or taxi as the **only** back seat passenger
- **You must not travel with children or pregnant women.**
- You may travel by public transport or walk accompanied if the journey time is less than one hour.

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When may I go back to work?

You may go back to work after the date on the card. If you work with children or pregnant women you should make arrangements to avoid close contact for the stated period.

Precautions

You will receive a sheet of instructions from staff detailing the precautions we ask you to follow after you have had the radio-iodine treatment. This will include the dates at which you can resume normal activities without hazard to other people. Most precautions will last from 6 to 12 days after your treatment, but for contact with children or pregnant women the period of precautions may last for three to four weeks.

Below is a summary of the precautions we will ask you to follow

- Avoid close contact with other people, but especially with children and pregnant women.
- Avoid public places like shops, cinemas, public houses, church.
- Do not go to work, unless it is solitary.
- Sleep alone.
- Avoid kissing.
- Reserve cutlery for your own use. Wash it thoroughly after use.
- Flush the toilet twice after use. Wash your hands thoroughly and rinse the basin thoroughly. It is suggested that men sit down when urinating to avoid any accidental spray of radioactive urine.
- Bathroom hygiene is the main way of avoiding contamination of other people.
- Make sure no one else uses your towels, toothbrush and face cloths.
- Avoid journeys which involve close proximity to other persons which exceed more than one hour.
- The longest period of precaution concerns contact with children and pregnant women.

If you look after children you should make arrangements for them to be cared for by others until the date specified.

Airports

There is a possibility that you may trigger radiation alarms at airports for up to three months following administration of radioactive iodine. If you decide to travel you may have to explain your treatment and the reason for the false alarm to the authorities. We suggest that you take this letter and the instruction card that you will receive at your appointment with you as supporting evidence.

Follow up

You will receive an appointment from the treating doctor or the physician who referred you, to assess the response to treatment.

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Other questions

- Apart from the precautions already mentioned, you may behave normally at home.
- Radio-iodine treatment will not affect such things as your vacuum cleaner or microwave.
- The effect on family pets is unknown; however problems have never been reported.

Additional

In addition please contact us if:

- you have a problem with incontinence or vomiting,
- you reside in a nursing home or receive nursing care at your home,
- your partner or carer provides essential care for you or
- for any reason you cannot follow the restrictions described in this letter.

Please ask if you are not clear on any aspect of this treatment

If you have any other questions or concerns then please ask when you attend for treatment, or telephone Nuclear Medicine at University Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm (Monday to Friday) on 024 7696 8212.

Patient satisfaction

We hope that you have found this booklet helpful. We welcome your comments on the care that you experience and the service that we offer within the Coventry Nuclear Medicine Department and Arden Cancer Centre.

We ask that specific complaints be addressed to a member of staff so that, in line with University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust's complaints policy, they can be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 8212 and we will do our best to accommodate your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

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