A Quick Guide

Radioactive iodine has been taken by mouth for the treatment of thyroid disorders for over 60 years.

When is radioactive iodine used in the treatment of non-cancerous thyroid disorders?
- To treat an over-active thyroid gland
- To reduce thyroid activity caused by nodules
- To shrink an enlarged thyroid
- As an alternative to surgery
- As an alternative to antithyroid drug therapy

Treatment
- As a drink
- As a capsule, taken with water

Are there any side effects?
- Long-term - hypothyroidism (under-active thyroid) may develop in 50-90% of people as an expected consequence of treatment
- Short-term - rarely, some soreness around the thyroid gland
- Existing thyroid eye disease may rarely worsen, particularly if the eyes are currently sore or inflamed

Is radioactive iodine treatment safe?
- Studies show there is no overall increased risk of thyroid or other cancers
- It should not be given to pregnant women or women who are breast-feeding
- Men should avoid fathering a child for six months, and women should avoid conceiving for six months, after radioactive iodine treatment
Fertility for both men and women is not affected
Avoid close contact with babies, children under six years and pregnant women and pets for two to three weeks or as advised by your clinical team

Follow-up
Blood tests are carried out
- around four times in the first year
- once a year thereafter
- Sometimes a second dose of radioiodine is needed
- There are no problems with having a follow-up dose

It is well recognised that thyroid problems often run in families and if family members are unwell they should be encouraged to discuss with their own GP whether thyroid testing is warranted.

This Quick Guide is one in a series about thyroid disorders. Quick Guides may be obtained from the British Thyroid Foundation’s office and website.

A leaflet containing comprehensive information about treatment of an over-active thyroid gland with radioactive iodine is available through membership of the British Thyroid Foundation. For a membership pack please telephone, or write to our postal address:

The British Thyroid Foundation
2nd Floor, 3 Devonshire Place, Harrogate HG1 4AA
Tel: 01423 709707 or 709448
Website: www.btf-thyroid.org

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Endorsed by:
The British Thyroid Association – medical professionals encouraging the highest standards in patient care and research
www.british-thyroid-association.org

The British Association of Endocrine and Thyroid Surgeons – the representative body of British Surgeons who have a specialist interest in surgery of the endocrine glands (thyroid, parathyroid and adrenal)
www.baets.org.uk

Our literature is reviewed every two years and revised if necessary.
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