



**BRISBANE
ENDOCRINE
AND
METABOLIC
SPECIALISTS**

- ☎ 07 3544 1772
- ☎ 07 3544 1773
- ✉ Admin@bemspecialists.com.au
- 🌐 Bemspecialists.com.au
- 📷 BEMSpecialists
- 📘 BEMSpecialists

Radioactive Iodine treatment fact sheet for Graves' Disease

What is radioactive iodine?

Radioactive iodine is a mild form of radiation treatment that is used to cure Graves' disease. It comes in a capsule that you swallow and is absorbed directly into your thyroid gland. The dose is low enough that you can go home the same day. Radioactive iodine stays in your thyroid gland for 4 days.

What happens to my thyroid gland after I take radioactive iodine?

This weak form of radioactive treatment switches off the thyroid gland & shrinks it down. This is a gradual process and can take 3 – 6 months for the thyroid to become underactive. You will then need Thyroid hormone tablets (Thyroxine) to replace the thyroid gland. You will need to take these for the rest of your life.

Is it bad to have no thyroid gland?

No, because the thyroid hormone tablets (Thyroxine) give you back the hormones that the thyroid can no longer make. The doctor will make sure the dose is right based on blood tests.

What are the side effects of radioactive iodine?

Radioiodine can cause mild side effects for 1 - 2 days. These may include:

- Discomfort in the neck
- Nausea, vomiting
- Fatigue or tiredness

- Aches and pains
- Dry mouth or dry eyes (this can occur years later)

Sometimes the radioiodine can stir up your thyroid gland and cause these symptoms:

- Palpitations, tremor
- Shortness of breath
- Anxiety, insomnia, fatigue

These symptoms are temporary, but if you have any symptoms, please see your doctor.

What precautions do I need to take before the radioiodine?

- Make sure you are not pregnant.
- Avoid eating foods containing iodine for 2 weeks (eg. iodized salt, fish, seafood, sushi, fish sauce)
- Stop taking iodine-containing vitamins, supplements or kelp for **2 weeks**
- Stop taking your thyroid tablets (Carbimazole or Propylthiouracil) for **4 days**
- Keep taking your other tablets
- Do not eat for **2 hours** before taking the radioiodine capsule.

What should I expect on the day I receive the radioactive iodine?

When you arrive at the Nuclear Medicine Department, the Radioiodine treatment will be explained to you. You may have a thyroid scan to make sure the radioactive iodine dose is right for you. You will be given the



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capsule of radioiodine to swallow with water. You are then free to go home.

What precautions do I need to take after the radioiodine?

For the **four (4) days** after you take the radioactive iodine:

- Keep your cutlery and crockery separate to everyone else's in your home
- Flush the toilet twice
- Drink water (1-2 litres per day)
- Sleep in a separate room to your partner
- Avoid close contact with babies, children, teenagers & pregnant women. You can safely be in the same room with them, but not within arm's length
- Keep taking your usual tablets.
- Don't take your Carbimazole

On **Day 5** after the radioactive iodine dose:

- Restart your usual dose of Carbimazole or Propylthiouracil

When do I need to get blood tests to check my thyroid?

- **Four weeks** after you take the radioactive iodine capsule

When can I go back to work?

If you work in close contact with children, babies or pregnant women

- Avoid work for five (5) days
- This makes sure that the radioactive iodine doesn't affect other people

If you do not work in close contact with children, babies or pregnant women

- You can return to work when you feel well – usually 1-2 days later

Urine Pregnancy Test:

- Negative
- Positive = Cancel Radioiodine

Steps:

1. Stop taking Carbimazole **4 days before radioiodine**
2. Date of Radioactive Iodine dose to be confirmed with Nuclear Medicine Department
3. Restart Carbimazole **4 days after radioiodine**
4. Thyroid blood tests **4 weeks after radioiodine**
5. Doctor's appointment **5 weeks after radioiodine**

This document has been adapted from the DDHHS RAI Fact sheet. All information contained in this sheet has been supplied by appropriately qualified professionals. It is a guideline for care only. Seek medical advice, as appropriate, for concerns regarding your health.