

Special Instructions about

Radioactive Iodine(¹³¹I) Treatment



Radioactive Iodine (^{131}I) Treatment

Your doctor has recommended treatment with Radioactive Iodine. This requires a hospital admission and we hope that your stay at Princess Margaret Hospital will be pleasant. Please read the following. If you have any questions, feel free to ask your doctor or RN case manager. If you are female it is important that you are not pregnant when you have iodine therapy. If it's possible that you may be, you will have a pregnancy test before you are given radioactive iodine.

What is Radioactive Iodine?

Radioactive Iodine is a substance used to treat thyroid cancer and gives off radiation. Radioactive Iodine goes to the thyroid gland area, where it is absorbed by any thyroid tissue. It works to kill any remaining normal thyroid and thyroid cancer cells.

How is Iodine given?

The radioactive iodine is administered in the form of capsules, to be taken orally under the supervision of an attending physician. After taking the capsules, you will be asked to follow special instructions to reduce radiation exposure to others as well as radioactive contamination of the room.

How long will I stay in the Hospital?

The average hospital stay for the treatment is two to three days or more depending on how quickly your body eliminates the radioactivity. A radiation warning sign will be put on your door after your treatment has begun. Items (personal or hospital-provided) that go into your room must remain there for the entire time that you are receiving treatment. Your personal belongings may become contaminated by radioactive iodine through body fluids such as saliva, sweat, and urine. Therefore, you should not bring personal items to the hospital that are not essential. You can bring an adequate supply of your own regular medications. Clothing you intend to wear when you are discharged can remain in the room closet and will not be contaminated if not touched by you.

What about visitors?

Visitors are not permitted while undergoing treatment. Please encourage family members to call you by phone.

How can I communicate with my Nurse?

Although your nurse will spend very little time in your room you can communicate frequently with your nurse by using the telephone or intercom. Your nurse will also check on you frequently by telephone or intercom to assess how you are doing. The telephone number of the nursing station is marked on your room telephone.

How will I feel after I begin treatment?

Most patients do not feel anything unusual. Infrequently you may experience a mild soreness in the neck or jaw areas, nausea, or a change in the ability to taste food. These are always transient and reversible. Contact your nurse as soon as you feel any symptoms.

Meals and snacks

- You will receive your meals on disposable dishes.
- You should drink plenty of fluids and empty your bladder frequently.
- You should bring candies to suck on (not chewing gum) during your stay.

Daily activities

- Carry out as much of your personal care as possible. If you need assistance please call your nurse.
- Wear a hospital gown during your entire stay.
- Wear old socks or hospital slippers when out of bed.
- Use good hygiene habits, wash hands frequently.
- Use the toilet marked “Tank Toilet”. The other toilet will be padlocked.
- Male patients should sit when emptying their bladders to prevent any splashing which will contaminate the surrounding area.
- Showering 2 to 3 times a day and washing your hair will help to remove the excreted radiation through perspiration. Extra towels will be provided for you.
- Frequent bowel movements are essential. If you do not have a bowel movement within 24 hours of receiving the iodine capsules, contact your nurse for a laxative.
- Place all soiled linen in containers provided.
- Ensure solid waste is placed in the waste receptical provided.
- Do not pour any liquids into the waste receptical.

What can I do during my hospital stay?

Many patients use these few days to rest, read, write letters, make telephone calls and relax. You may bring reading and writing materials with you. Televisions and telephones are available in each room, for an extra charge.

When can I go home?

You can expect to be in hospital from 2 to 4 days. A Nuclear Medicine Technologist or Radiation Safety Officer will monitor your radiation level. When the radiation level is acceptable for release, you will be ready to go home. Before you leave the hospital you will be given instructions by your doctor when to start thyroid hormone medication, and arrangements for any necessary scans and follow-up appointment.

Going Home

Upon release from hospital please follow these special instructions to minimize radiation exposure to others.

For one week...

- Continue to drink plenty of fluids and avoid constipation.
- Minimize close physical contact with others (such as kissing or hugging), particularly pregnant women and young children.
- Wash eating utensils separately. This includes all dishes, cups, glasses, forks, knives and spoons that you eat with.
- Keep your bath towels and face cloths separate. Wash your towels and face cloths separately from other household items.
- Wash all your linen separately from others.
- Wash hands well after using the toilet. Flush toilet 2 to 3 times after use. Men should sit on the toilet to avoid splashing urine.
- Refrain from sexual activity.
- With regard to your partner and children, adopt separate sleeping arrangements.

Other instructions...

- Sexual activity may resume after one week, but an appropriate birth control method should be used.
- Do not become pregnant or father a child after Radioactive Iodine treatment for 6 months for women and 2 months for men. You may wish to discuss contraceptive methods with your doctor.
- If you were breastfeeding, it must not be restarted, but you may breastfeed subsequent births.