

FAQ: Low Iodine Diet

What is the thyroid gland?

The thyroid gland located in the neck produces thyroid hormones which help the body use energy, stay warm and keep the brain, heart, muscles, and other organs working normally.

Overview

To increase the effectiveness of your upcoming radioactive iodine therapy, you may be prescribed a low iodine diet. Iodine is used in the care and feeding of animals and as a stabilizer and/or safety element in food processing. Therefore, it may be found in varying amounts in all food and beverages. The highest sources (and those to be avoided) are iodized salt, grains and cereals, white bread, fish from the sea, shellfish, beef, poultry, pudding mixes, milk and milk products. Detailed recipes that follow a low iodine diet can be found on the following websites: www.checkyourneck.com (Light of Life Foundation) and www.thyca.org (ThyCa: Thyroid Cancer Survivors' Association). Below are general guidelines to follow on this diet.

AVOID THE FOLLOWING FOODS

- Iodized salt, sea salt, foods high in salt, baking soda and sodium
- Any vitamins or supplements that contain iodine (especially kelp and dulse)
- Milk or other dairy products including ice cream, cheese, yogurt and butter
- Seafood including fish, sushi, shellfish, kelp or seaweed
- Foods that contain the additive carrageen, agar-agar, alginate, or nori
- Cured and corned foods (such as ham, lox, corned beef, sauerkraut, cold cuts)
- Commercially prepared bakery products that could be made with iodate dough conditioners
- FD&C red dye #3 - this appears in many foods or pills that are red or brown, including colas, and in maraschino cherries
- Egg yolks, whole eggs and foods containing whole eggs
- Dried fruits
- Canned vegetables (salt-free canned vegetables are fine)
- Most chocolate (due to milk content)
- Blackstrap Molasses (unsulfured molasses is fine)
- Soy products (soy sauce, soy milk, tofu)

FOODS THAT ARE OK

- Non-iodized salt may be used as desired
- Egg whites
- Fresh noncured meat from the butcher
- Homemade bread made with non-iodized salt and oil (not soy!) instead of butter or milk
- Most fresh fruits and vegetables (but not too much spinach & broccoli), washed well
- Frozen vegetables that don't have high-iodine ingredients (like regular salt) added
- Grain, cereal products and pasta without high iodine ingredients
- Canned peaches, pears and pineapples
- Natural unsalted nuts and nut butters (peanut, almond, etc)
- Clear sodas, beer, wine, lemonade, fruit juices
- Non-instant coffee or tea, as long as it's made with distilled water. But remember, only non-dairy creamer!
- Popcorn popped in vegetable oil or air popped, with non-iodized salt
- Black pepper, fresh or dried herbs and spices, all vegetable oils
- Sugar, jam, jelly, honey maple syrup
- Matzoh crackers (unsalted)

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES

- Avoid restaurant foods since there is no reasonable way to determine which restaurants use iodized salt.
- Consult your doctor before discontinuing any red-colored medication or any medication containing iodine (i.e., Amiodarone, expectorants, topical antiseptics).
- Avoid all herbal supplements (especially when one is not sure how much iodine they contain).

MENU OPTIONS

Breakfast

- Any fruit or fruit juices
- Egg Beaters
- Oatmeal with toppings – cinnamon, honey, applesauce, maple syrup, walnuts, fruit
- 1 slice toast with unsalted butter
- Black coffee or clear tea

Lunch

- Vegetarian or chicken with rice soup (not canned)
- Unsalted Matzoh crackers
- White or brown rice with vegetable plate (fresh or frozen)
- Salad – fruit or vegetable – oil and vinegar dressing
- Fruits – fresh, frozen or canned
- Black coffee or clear tea

Dinner

- 6 oz Roast beef, lamb, veal, pork, or turkey
- Potato – baked or broiled with salt-free butter
- Vegetables (fresh or frozen)
- Salad – fruit or vegetable – oil and vinegar dressing
- Fruits
- Black coffee or clear tea

Snacks

- Fresh fruit or juice
- Dried fruits such as raisins
- Fresh raw vegetables
- Applesauce
- Unsalted nuts
- Fruit juice
- Unsalted peanut butter (great with apple slices, carrot sticks, crackers or rice cakes)
- Matzoh and other unsalted crackers
- Home-made bread and muffins

SUMMARY GUIDE

- No iodized salt
- No dairy products or foods containing dairy products
- No foods from the sea
- No processed meats (ie ham, bacon, sausage, hot dogs, deli meats)
- No canned soups or broth
- Limited grain products (ie noodles, pasta, pastries) – 1 slice bread, ½ cup pasta daily
- Limited amounts of beef, chicken and turkey

WHERE CAN I FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

Further details on this and other thyroid-related topics are available in the patient information section on the American Thyroid Association website at www.thyroid.org.

