

Radioactive iodine for hyperthyroid

What is hyperthyroid?

Thyroid gland is located at the anterior neck. Its function is to produce thyroid hormone which helps to promote the body's metabolism.

Hyperthyroid is a state in which the thyroid gland produces too much hormone and causes symptoms such as dyspnea, palpitation, sweating, and weight loss.

What is radioactive iodine?

Radioactive iodine is a form of iodine that has radiation. Normally, the thyroid gland uses iodine in food to produce thyroid hormones.

Radioactive iodine has beta particles that will destroy the thyroid gland if ingested. This reduces the thyroid gland overactivity and cures hyperthyroid.

How long will radioactive iodine stay in our body?

Radioactive iodine stays in the body for 1-2 weeks. Most radiation is not located in the thyroid gland and is excreted outside the body in the first 3 days. The radiation is excreted mainly in urine. Less radiation comes out via saliva, sweat, and feces.

How is the radioactive iodine treatment performed?

The patient will receive a capsule that contains radioactive iodine. The size is about a paracetamol tablet. The patient swallows the capsule with water. The capsule has no taste. The radioactive iodine solution is not frequently used due to the risk of contamination. It will be used if the patient cannot swallow the capsule.

What are the effects of radioactive iodine treatment?

You will have a high chance of permanent hypothyroid. However, hypothyroid can be more easily treated than hyperthyroid. You need to take thyroxine supplements for the rest of your life, which is easy and safe.

Temporary side effects include neck discomfort and swelling, nausea, sialadenitis, loss of taste, dry mouth, and dry eye.

Some patients may develop progressive hyperthyroid after the radioactive iodine treatment, usually occurring 1-2 weeks. They may experience palpitation and dyspnea. The doctor can prescribe beta blockers and antithyroid drugs after the treatment.

The cancer risk of the radioactive iodine treatment is very low and can be negligible.

Do you need to stop antithyroid medication?

Yes, the most common antithyroid drug is Methimazole (MMI). You should stop MMI before the radioactive iodine treatment for 3-7 days and may continue after the treatment for 3-7 days in case of a high risk of hyperthyroid progression.

Are there any precautions after the radioactive iodine treatment?

After the treatment, you will have low radiation in your body. Therefore, it is important to protect other people from this exposure, especially children and pregnant women, because they are very sensitive to the radiation. You should stay away from others at least 2 meters for 1-2 weeks for the radiation to reduce.

You will be advised to drive home by yourself if possible. You should sleep separately from others in your house. Take a break from your work. Reduce time in public. Do not cook for others and do not share utensils as well. Clean the bathroom after usage.

In the first week, if you need to travel to the airport, you should bring the letter from your doctor, because the radiation from your body might be detected by the detector.

How many times do I need to receive radioactive iodine treatment?

Patients usually achieve remission within 6 months. Unfortunately, some patients might not be cured and may require another treatment.