Your radioiodine treatment for thyrotoxicosis

Information for patients
Nuclear Medicine

Your radioiodine treatment

Your doctor would like you to come to the Nuclear Medicine department for your treatment. Below are answers to some questions you may have and some guidelines for you after your treatment. Your appointment letter will also give you more information.

Why do I need treatment?

You have a condition called Thyrotoxicosis. This means that your thyroid gland is overactive. Your doctor will have discussed treatment options with you.

How will this treatment work?

To treat this condition we will ask you to have a capsule or a drink of a substance called radioiodine. This will concentrate in your thyroid gland and treat the condition. Any iodine that does not concentrate in your thyroid gland passes out of your body in your sweat and urine.

How will I feel afterwards?

There are usually no side effects. It can take between a few weeks and several months for the treatment to work. Most people are cured by a single dose of radioiodine. If the treatment has not worked within six months, it can be repeated.

Will I have time to discuss the treatment?

You will have 2 appointments to visit our department. We will discuss the treatment and any specific questions you may have on your first visit. Please be sure to inform us if you have any problems with incontinence, as further advice on disposal of pads will be required, or if you use a commode that needs emptying, or your house is not connected to mains sewage. You will also have a scan of your thyroid during this visit. This involves laying on a scanning bed with the camera above your head and neck for 10 minutes.

Do I need to do anything before the treatment?

Please read the instructions in your appointment letter carefully. If you do not follow the instructions fully we may not be able to carry out your treatment.
Can I have the treatment if I am pregnant or breast feeding?

Radioiodine treatment is a procedure using ionising radiation. You will not be given radioiodine treatment if you are pregnant or wish to continue breast feeding. It is advisable that all women who have the potential to become pregnant use reliable contraception for 2 weeks prior to their treatment.

Do I need to stop taking tablets or medicine?

Your appointment letter will tell you if you need to stop or change medicines. If you normally have pain relief please take this as normal and bring it along with you.

What happens on my treatment visit?

You will be asked to confirm that you will comply with the precautions set out with your treatment. You will then be given a small capsule to swallow and asked to wait in the department for half an hour while it is absorbed through your stomach.

What if I can't swallow capsules?

Please inform the technologist at your first visit, you may be able to have the treatment as a small drink. The capsule is similar in size to a paracetamol capsule.

What do I have to do after the treatment?

You will be asked to drink plenty of fluids for 1-2 weeks after the treatment. This helps wash the radioactivity out of your body.

After the treatment you will be quite ‘radioactive’, so we ask you to take certain precautions to protect your family and members of the general public from exposure to the radiation. This mainly applies to children, teenagers and pregnant women. Depending on your job, we may also ask you to stay off work for a period of time.

Is it harmful?

Provided you take these precautions, the treatment is perfectly safe for you and those you contact.

What information will I get on my treatment visit?

You will be given a card to carry for 4 weeks. This card has all the dates and times of the precautions for your treatment. After the treatment, you can ring us for advice at any time if there is anything you are worried about.

Can we help make your visit better?

If you have difficulty walking or lying flat, or you feel very unwell, please contact the Nuclear Medicine Department and ask to speak to someone about your needs, wherever possible before your appointment. Please let us know if we can help with other difficulties you may have, such as hearing or visual impairment.
I need an interpreter

Please contact us before your appointment if you need an interpreter, as we are not able to use members of your family as interpreters.

Training staff in the Nuclear Medicine Department

Hospitals in Sheffield are teaching hospitals and our Medical Physics department is involved in training staff. There may be students under training in the department who may be observing scans or carrying out the scans under supervision. Please inform us if you do not wish to have a student present.

Consent for the treatment

We must seek your consent for any procedure or treatment beforehand. Staff will explain risks, benefits and alternatives where relevant before they ask for your consent. If you are unsure about any aspect of the procedure or treatment proposed, please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

Precaution guidelines

Below are guidelines of the precautions you will have to take. A range of times is given because the amount of radioiodine given for treatment varies between patients. Specific times are given on the card you will be asked to carry for 4 weeks.

The general public

You are asked to avoid public places and places of entertainment for between 5-11 days, e.g. theatre, cinema, concerts, pubs - anywhere where you may be inadvertently sitting next to a woman who may be pregnant. We also suggest you avoid the hairdresser, the dentist, and the doctor's surgery during this time. Clearly you should attend the doctor or dentist for a medical emergency, but should advise them of the radioactive iodine treatment you have received. If you regularly have a carer or district nurse please tell us on your first visit.

Public transport

You are also unable to travel on public transport on the day of your treatment and possibly for a few days after. Long journeys with others, over 1 hour, should be avoided for between 5 to 11 days.

Work

If you travel to and from work by private transport and your work does not involve close contact with other people, i.e. prolonged close contact of distances of less than 1 metre (3 feet), you may not need to stay off work after the day of treatment.

If, however, your work does involve close contact with other people you will need to stay off work for between 5-20 days. If you work with children, pregnant women, in the food industry or the photographic industry, you will need to stay off work for between 17-22 days. If you work on a building site where there are no mains-connected toilet facilities you will also need to stay off work for between 17-22 days.
Family

Because your family are with you all the time, their exposure to the radiation is much more than that of the general public. Therefore, it is necessary to take precautions for longer. This also applies to neighbours' children if they visit frequently.

You will need to avoid close personal contact with children, teenagers, and pregnant women for between 21-26 days. By close contact we mean 1 metre (3 feet) distance between you. A pass in the corridor is not a problem, but do not sit next to each other on the settee or have the child on your knee. Sit at opposite sides of the dinner table.

Car journeys should be no longer than 1 hour and the child should sit diagonally across from you, i.e. the maximum distance. Avoid the 'school run' if you normally take several children to school in your car.

Preparing food is not a problem: just use good hygiene, i.e. wash your hands frequently. If you have two toilets it may be simpler to keep one for your use only. If not, it doesn’t matter; just give it an extra flush. Men should urinate sitting down.

If the child is not old enough to understand that they need to stay away from you, it may be better if they don’t see you. For some children it is more distressing to be with you in the house and not be able to come to you. In such circumstances, it may be better if they or you move out. You know your own child/grandchild best. Older children often find it quite amusing and will help you keep your distance. They will all be disappointed that you don’t ‘glow in the dark’. If there is an occasional lapse and the child runs to you, don’t panic just try to avoid it happening again.

Because some of the radioiodine is in your sweat, we suggest that you don’t knit baby garments or make toys or dolls during this period, and keep a towel and facecloth solely for your own personal use.

We would recommend separate sleeping arrangements, sleeping apart for between 9-15 days. Whilst the treatment does not affect your fertility in the long term, it is important that both men and women use a reliable contraceptive for at least 6 months after treatment.

Pets

Many people worry about their pets. If your pet is pregnant, or a pedigree from whom you wish to breed, avoid close contact with them for 14 days. Otherwise there is no problem with them sitting at your feet or on your lap. Avoid having them close to your neck.

Frequent questions:

What shall I do if I cannot attend?

Please contact the department as soon as possible if you are unable to attend for your appointment. This allows us to give your appointment to another patient and helps to reduce waiting times. If you do not attend and do not telephone the department to warn us then your referral will be sent back to your doctor and you will not be offered another appointment.

I am going on holiday after my treatment

Radioactivity will remain in your body for a period after your treatment. There is a possibility that this will be picked up by the sensitive radiation detectors at some airports, train stations and seaports. This
is no cause for concern, but we suggest that you carry the card you will be given, with you when travelling abroad during the 6 months following your treatment.

**What follow-up care will I need?**

You will not need any special care after the scan or treatment and your consultant will follow you up with regular blood tests.

**Are there any risks in having children afterwards?**

There are no effects on the unborn babies of women who have been treated with radioiodine more than six months before they got pregnant, or on the health of those children. The treatment does not affect a woman’s fertility.

**Will it hurt?**

For the scan you will have an injection. As with any injection, the pin prick may hurt slightly. You may have had a blood test in the past - it is much the same. The treatment is painless.

**Is there a weight limit on the scanner?**

There is a weight limit on some of our equipment. Please contact the department if you weigh more than 180kg (28 stone).

**Will I glow in the dark?**

No. The radiation will be emitted from your body without you being aware of it.

**Should I have any concerns relating to my religious beliefs?**

If you feel that there are any aspects of your scan or treatment procedure that conflict with your religious beliefs, please let us know as soon as possible.

**Will I feel different?**

You should not feel any ill effects from the scan or treatment. It will not make you sleepy or stop you from driving a car.

**Where can I find more information?**

If you need to know more about your appointments please contact the reception on the number given on your appointment letter; asking for a member of the Nuclear Medicine team. You may also like to view our website at: www.sth.nhs.uk. If you have any questions about your clinical condition you should contact your doctor.

**Car parking: allow extra time before your appointment as parking is limited.**

**Northern Hospital:**
A number of pay-and-display car parks are available. However, these do get full quickly. Remember to bring some change to pay for parking.

**Hallamshire Hospital:**
A pay-on-exit car park is available. If you are expected to stay in the department for over 4 hours, please ask for a reduced price ticket at our reception.

**Weston Park Hospital:**
Car parking is available. However, there are a limited number of spaces.
Nuclear Medicine, part of the Directorate of Medical Imaging and Medical Physics at:

Northern General Hospital
E Floor (follow purple signs for Vickers corridor)
Herries Road
Sheffield S5 7AU
Reception Tel: 0114 271 4374

Royal Hallamshire Hospital
1 floor
Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2JF
Reception Tel: 0114 271 2779

Weston Park Hospital
(Ground Floor)
Whitham Road
Sheffield S10 2SJ
Reception (RHH) Tel: 0114 271 2779

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals operate a no smoking policy in and around all its premises