

Iodine FAQ

Is having too little iodine common?

Yes, iodine insufficiency is very common in the USA - a conservative estimate is that 30% of the general US population is iodine insufficient. Some physicians report up to 90% of their patients showing insufficiency.

Don't I get enough iodine in my diet, like in iodized salt?

No, the amount of iodine in salt is just enough to prevent goiter (enlarged thyroid gland) and cretinism (severe mental retardation). The RDA (recommended daily allowance) for iodine in the US is 150 micrograms. The mainland Japanese diet provides a daily average of 13,800 micrograms. That is 92 times greater than the US RDA. The Japanese have a substantially lower risk for cancer (particularly breast and ovary) and heart disease and greater longevity. Note: the RDA for cats in Europe is 150 micrograms.

What is iodine deficiency associated with?

Some of the well-known conditions related to iodine insufficiency are: hypothyroidism, goiter, increased cancer risks (breast, ovary and prostate gland), fibrocystic breast disease, cardiac arrhythmias and adult onset diabetes

Can I take iodine supplements if I'm on Thyroid medications?

Yes, and once the total body iodine stores are replete (restored), a lower dose or complete cessation of the medication is possible (consult your physician).

What if I have an iodine allergy? Can I still take iodine supplements?

Yes, iodine allergies are essentially a myth in that they are very rare. To be allergic to iodine would be tantamount to being allergic to an essential nutrient. Those individuals who react to iodine containing intravenous contrast material, iodine skin preparations and shell fish are reacting allergically to a component other than the iodine. This position has been established by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. (*Academy Position Statement: The risk of Severe Allergic Reactions from the Use of Potassium Iodide for Radiation Emergencies. American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, February 24, 2004*).

Can I replace iodine with a liquid supplement or a tablet?

Yes, either form works well. There are several liquid preparations, e.g. Lugol's and SSKI solutions available, however, they may have a metallic taste and can stain clothing. Tablets have the advantage of being coated so they pass by the taste buds without ill-effect and will not stain clothing. Also tablets travel much easier and will not be an issue at Airport security.

I've heard that the iodine skin test works just as well as the iodine Spot and Load Urine test for determining whether I'm deficient in iodine. Is that true?

No, the skin test will not accurately assess your body's tissue stores of iodine. The skin test will only reflect your local absorption of liquid iodine at that site. Since 88 % of the iodine applied to the skin will evaporate, you are only absorbing 12 percent of the applied iodine.

Additionally, this iodine evaporation increases with increased air temperatures and decreased atmospheric pressure, so depending on whether you are in Colorado or California you may have a substantial difference in skin patch results. Note also that the yellow color of iodine will disappear when reduced to iodide by the skin since iodide is white. So it is thought that this is not so much a reflection of iodine deficiency (when the yellow color leaves) but the expected conversion to the iodide (white) form. In conclusion, the skin test is not an effective means for evaluating iodine deficiency. Guy Abrahams MD concisely summarizes it thusly: *"...the iodine patch test is not a reliable method to assess whole body insufficiency for iodine. Many factors play a role in the disappearance of the yellow color of iodine from the surface of the skin...the iodine/iodide loading test is much more accurate"*.