Having a radioiodine whole body scan

A radioiodine whole body scan is a special type of test which finds areas of your body that take up iodine. Radioiodine is a radioactive form of iodine. The test involves swallowing a small tablet and having some pictures taken of your body using a special camera called a gamma camera.

How do I prepare for the test?
Women must not be pregnant or breastfeeding.

If you are taking T3 (Triiodothyronine) you must stop this 2 weeks before the test.

If you are taking T4 (Thyroxine) you must stop this 4 weeks before the test.

A diet that is rich in iodine can reduce the effectiveness of the test. Therefore for 7 days before your first visit we recommend the following:

- **Do** eat fresh meat, vegetables, fresh fruit, pasta and rice. These are low in iodine.
- **Avoid** fish, fish oils, kelp and all seafood.
- **Avoid** vitamin supplements and cough medicines containing iodine.
- **Avoid** iodised salt. Ordinary table salt is fine.
- **Do not** eat glacé and maraschino cherries which contain the colouring material E127. This may also be found in some red coloured processed foods. Food coloured by spices is allowed.
- **Try to cut down** on dairy produce such as eggs, cheese, milk and milk products as they all contain some iodine. (A limited amount in tea and on cereal is ok).

Please only have a light meal for 2 hours before your treatment. You should then wait for a further 2 hours after the treatment before eating again.
What is involved in having a radioiodine whole body scan?
Radioiodine scans take place in the Nuclear Medicine Department.

The test involves 2 visits to the department on different days.

On the first visit you will be given a tablet, which will contain a small amount of radioiodine. The tablet is similar in size to a Paracetamol tablet. If you have any difficulties swallowing tablets please inform the Nuclear Medicine Department as soon as possible. This part of the test will take about 15 minutes.

On your second visit you will be required to lie on a narrow bed. A machine called a gamma camera will be placed next to your body. You will not need to undress, although you may have to remove loose change or metal objects from your pockets. Pictures of your body will be taken for 45 minutes. Once the pictures have been completed, you will be allowed to leave the department.

What do I need to do after the scan?
Women must avoid becoming pregnant for at least 6 months.

Men should avoid fathering children for at least 4 months following the scan.

We also ask you to drink more fluids for the next couple of days after having the radioiodine tablet (2 - 3 litres per day).

Any radioiodine that isn’t taken up by your body will be present in your urine in the first few days after having the radioiodine tablet. Please follow the precautions listed below:

- Women patients must not be pregnant or breastfeeding.
- The toilet should be flushed twice. Men should use the toilet sitting down to avoid spills of urine on the floor.
- Wipe up any spilled urine with a tissue and flush it away.
- Ensure that you always wash your hands after using the toilet and before preparing food.
- If you use any urine collection device, take advice on its use from your hospital doctor.
- If you cut yourself, wash away the spilled blood.
- Avoid close and prolonged contact with adults for 24 hours.
- Avoid close and prolonged contact with children and pregnant women for up to 2 weeks.

If you work in close contact with adults or children for long periods of time you may be required to take some time off work. Please contact the department on the number below to discuss this.

When will I know the results?
Not straight away. A doctor who specialises in reading these pictures needs to study them in detail. They will send a report to the doctor who asked for this test and you will get the report when you see your doctor at your next outpatient appointment.
Are there any risks involved in having a radioiodine scan?
There are no significant side-effects from having radioiodine. Iodine is a naturally occurring substance that is present in your normal diet. You will have to stop your thyroid medication before the scan and may experience the effects of this.

Radiation risks
There is a significant risk to your baby should you be pregnant. You must therefore not be pregnant when you have radioiodine. You must also avoid becoming pregnant for at least 6 months.

If you are breastfeeding a baby, radioiodine could go from your breast milk to your baby. This could cause harm to your baby. You must therefore have stopped breastfeeding when you have a radioiodine scan.

The radiation exposure that you will receive from this test is typically about double that which you get every year from natural background radiation. Most of the radioiodine leaves your body fairly rapidly through your urine.

When compared to other medical tests that use radiation, such as x-ray procedures, most nuclear medicine scans involve the same amount or less radiation.

Are there any alternative treatment options?
Your consultant will have decided that this is the best scan option. You will also have the opportunity to discuss the scan with your doctor. If you do not want the procedure carried out, you can decide against it. The scan is to confirm the site(s) of any iodine uptake and to ensure you receive the most appropriate medical treatment.

If you have any queries, or require further information please contact the Nuclear Medicine Department, Royal Derby Hospital on 01332 788197.

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