

Iodine in Tasmania

What is iodine?

Iodine is a nutrient needed by the body for normal thyroid function, growth and development. The thyroid gland, located at the base of the neck below the chin, produces the thyroid hormone. The thyroid hormone is essential for normal growth and development. A lack of iodine in diet can result in an enlarged thyroid gland (goitre) and iodine deficiency disorders.

Even mild to moderate iodine deficiency can affect growth and development in unborn babies, infants and young children.

What is the problem in Tasmania?

Tasmania has had a long history of iodine deficiency because of the nature of the State's soil.

In the 1950s and 1960s iodine tablets were provided for school children and later iodine was added to bread. In recent times, iodine based cleaning agents used in the dairy industry are thought to have provided some protection against iodine deficiency as small quantities have remained present in the milk supply. Cleaning agents that do not contain iodine are now used by some sections of the dairy industry and it is thought that this may be contributing to a reduction of iodine in the diet.

Iodine deficiency is not uncommon. There are many other areas of the world (Europe, America and Asia) that have iodine deficient soils and a history of iodine deficiency where public health measures using iodised salt are in place.

The Department of Health and Human Services has been monitoring human iodine status for many years. Recent studies have shown that mild iodine deficiency has returned in Tasmania.

What is Tasmania doing about iodine deficiency?

To address iodine deficiency the Department of Health and Human Services is working with the bread and salt industries, medical experts and the national food regulation body to implement the Tasmanian Iodine Supplementation Program.

In Tasmania many bakeries have agreed to use iodised salt in preference to regular salt. Some of these bakeries signed an agreement indicating they were willing to make the switch. These bakeries are listed on the Department of Health and Human Services website:
<<http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/foodandnutrition/iodine/index.html>>.

However, quite a number of smaller bakeries were happy to switch to using iodised salt in place of regular salt but chose not to sign the agreement.

The Department will continue to monitor human iodine status to check that iodine levels are improving.

The program is supported by the State Ministerial Thyroid Advisory Committee. The Thyroid Advisory Committee is made up of experts in child health, endocrinology, nutrition and public health.

Why Bread?

Bread is a widely consumed nutritious food. Bread already contains salt.

Iodised salt has the same taste and smell as ordinary table salt. Iodised salt does not alter the taste or texture of the bread. The use of iodised salt in bread making can increase human iodine levels.

Adding iodised salt to bread instead of ordinary salt is safe, simple and cheap.



What should I eat?

Maintaining a healthy balanced diet is essential to good health. Even if you do not have any symptoms of iodine deficiency, it is still important to consume foods which are good sources of iodine.

WHO, UNICEF, and ICCIDD recommend the daily intake of iodine as follows:

- 90 µg for preschool children (0 to 5 years);
- 120 µg for schoolchildren (6 to 12 years);
- 150 µg for adults (above 12 years); and
- 200 µg for pregnant and lactating women.

Good sources of iodine are bread (when baked with iodised salt), dairy milk, and yoghurt, saltwater fish and other seafoods.



Examples of iodine content of some foods

- 35g slice of bread baked with iodised salt (toast slice) = 18 µg
- 25g slice of bread baked with iodised salt (sandwich slice) = 13 µg
- 1 cup (250mL) cows milk(full cream or reduced fat) = 46 µg
- 80g canned salmon = about 28 µg
- 120g salt water fish = about 46 µg



What if I have a pre-existing thyroid problem?

People with pre-existing thyroid problems, such as hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism, need to take special care and seek medical advice from their doctor.

You should also see your doctor if you suspect you may have a thyroid problem.

For further information please contact the public health information line 1800 671 738.

