



# The Low-Iodine Diet

*When Preparing to Receive Radioactive Iodine  
for a Thyroid Cancer Test or Treatment*

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ThyCa: Thyroid Cancer Survivors' Association, Inc.

From information from ThyCa medical advisors and conference speakers.

[www.thyca.org](http://www.thyca.org)

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# Why do I *need* to do this diet?

- ▶ Thyroid tissue and thyroid cancer tissue “suck up” iodine.
- ▶ If you eat your usual diet, your thyroid and thyroid cancer tissue will have “resident” iodine.
- ▶ You need to go on a low-iodine diet (LID) to reduce the amount of resident iodine.
- ▶ This makes you “iodine hungry” and the day you swallow your radioactive iodine tracer or treatment dose, the radioiodine will be more effective.
- ▶ If you do not follow the diet, your “resident iodine” will make it more difficult for the radioactive iodine to get into your thyroid and thyroid cancer tissue.

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# Why do I *want* to do this diet?

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- Some of us find the diet difficult to follow.
- We can't have some of the foods we like.
  - We can't use conveniences like “fast food.” We have to be careful if we eat out, or if friends give us a casserole or other food.
- Why should I *want* to do this diet?
  - Control! In a time in your life when so much seems out of your control, here's a part of the testing or treatment that YOU can do!

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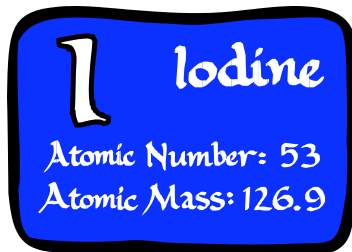
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## Do I eat some iodine while I'm on the diet?

- ▶ Yes. Very tiny amounts. This is a LOW-iodine diet. It's NOT a "NO"-iodine diet.
- ▶ It's important to stay on the diet! Your goal is fewer than 50 micrograms of iodine per day.
- ▶ Do the diet for the time your doctor advises before you swallow the radioactive iodine. Some people choose to add a few days.
  - This gives you a few days to get used to the diet
  - Follow the diet carefully for the prescribed time. Typically 1 to 2 weeks, but listen to your doctor!
- ▶ Plan ahead so you don't eat something you shouldn't.

# How can I remember??

- Label what you can have.
- Put a list on the cupboard, refrigerator, or both.  
(one-page list in ThyCa's Free Cookbook)
- Put what you can't have in the back of the refrigerator or in a high cupboard.
- Wear a reminder or change your wrist bracelet to your other arm



Read  
the  
label

# Can I have salt?

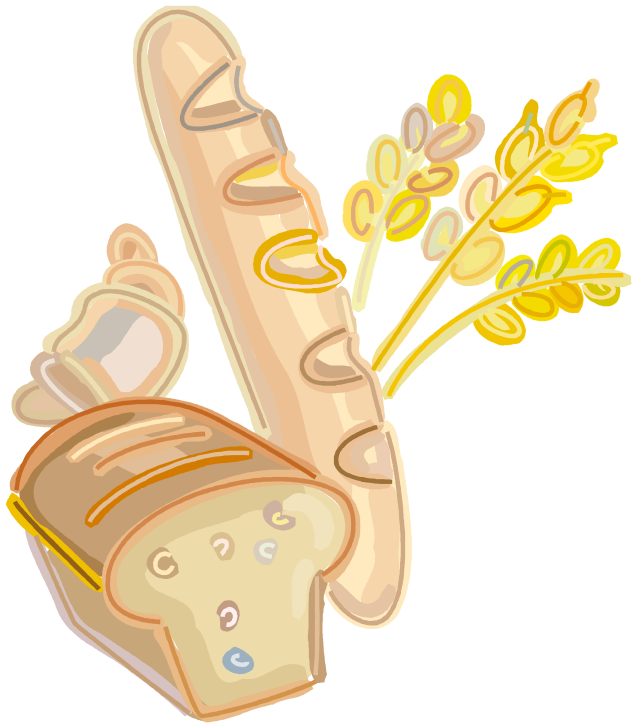


**O.K. If not iodized,  
and not from the sea.**

**MAYBE, if kosher.  
READ THE LABEL.  
Some kosher salt  
is iodized.**

~~**NO, if it's iodized,  
or is sea salt.  
Read the label.**~~

# Can I have bread?



- Yes, if you bake it yourself and use a low-iodine recipe.
- Maybe, if it's from the grocery store. Read the label.
- If you are looking for bread substitutes, try Matzos.



# Why can't I have some kinds of commercially baked bread?

Some bread and baked goods prepared outside your home in industrial facilities have an ingredient called a “dough conditioner,” which may contain iodine.

- Some commercial food preparation equipment is cleaned with iodine-based products
- Plus, some bread has salt, and sometimes it's iodized salt.

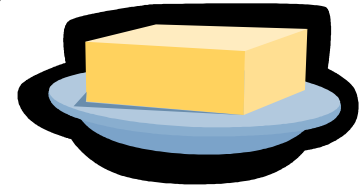
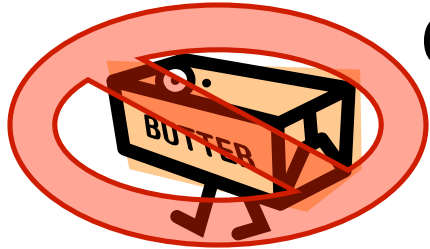


# What about chocolate?

- Some chocolate is okay. Some is not okay.
- The reason you must avoid some chocolate is that it contains milk or milk fat.
- However, you can bake many chocolate goodies using milk-free chocolate ingredients.
  - Plain cocoa and plain dark chocolate are examples. Read the label!



I know I can't have butter...but why can't I have margarine?



- Most margarines contain some form of milk product, salt, or both



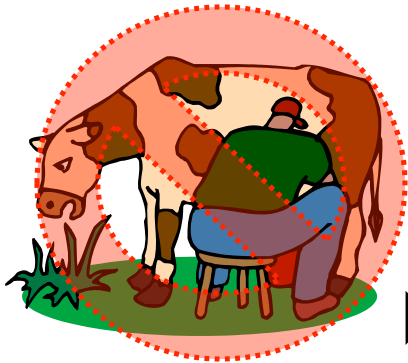
- Read the label.

- If you want a salty flavor, let a stick of margarine soften, stir in one half teaspoon noniodized salt, and put it back into the refrigerator.

- Or, olive oil makes an easy substitute for butter or margarine.

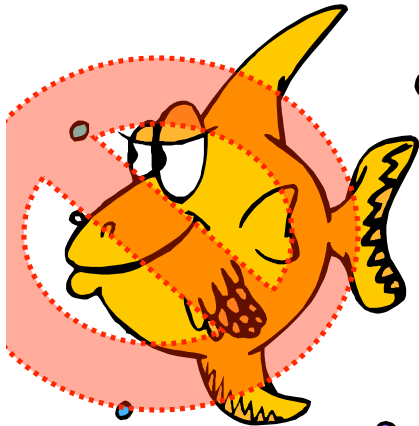
# The Details – Foods to avoid

- ▶ Avoid iodized salt, sea salt, and salty foods.



- You must assume that restaurants use iodized salt. So if you eat out, eat only simple things like orange juice and the inside of a plain baked potato.

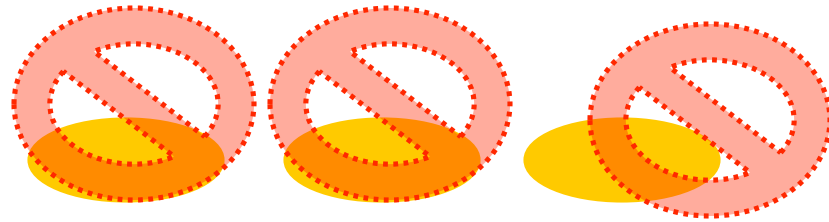
- ▶ Avoid dairy products (milk, sour cream, cheese, cream, yogurt, butter, ice cream). Very tiny amounts (like a teaspoon or tablespoon per day) are allowed on some diets from thyroid cancer treatment centers.



- ▶ Avoid seafood and any product from the sea (fish or shellfish. Also seaweed, kelp, contain carrageen, agar-agar, nori, algin, or alginate — all of these are made from seaweed.)

## The Details, continued...foods to avoid

- Avoid egg yolks

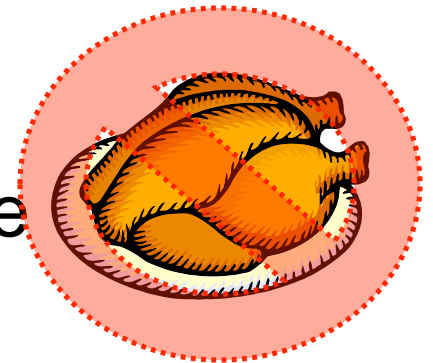


- Egg whites are fine to eat! Some diets allow a packaged food containing egg if the label does not list egg in the top 3 ingredients.

- Avoid cured meats like ham, bacon, sausage, corned beef, unless you're sure that the salt is not iodized or sea salt.

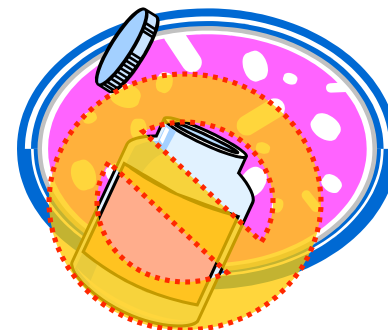


- Avoid fresh chicken or turkey that has injected broth or other additives. These usually contain salt.



## The Details, continued...

- Avoid some molasses (the concentrated bitter blackstrap or sulfured molasses). It's okay to eat the common sweet unsulfured molasses. Brown sugar is okay also.
- Avoid most soy products (soy sauce, soy milk, tofu)
  - Soybean oil and soy lecithin are safe
- Avoid vitamins or supplements that contain iodine. Many multivitamin/mineral preparations contain iodine. Some patients choose to stop taking vitamins while on the diet.



## The Details, continued...

- Be sure to ask your doctor before you stop taking a medicine.
- Avoid FD&C Red Dye #3: Used in food, medicines, some soft drinks
  - If the label just says “red dye” or “dye” and the food is artificially colored red, pink, orange, or brown, it’s best to avoid it.

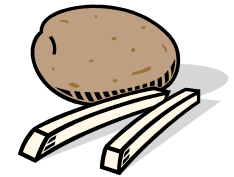


# What about these foods?

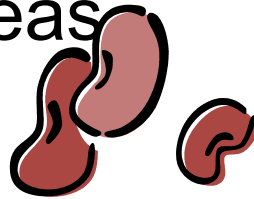
- Rhubarb? The diet from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) says to avoid it. That may be because the type contained in a herbal tea is advertised as being a good source of iodine.



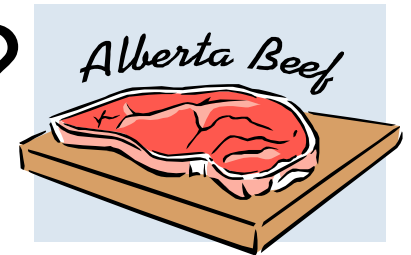
- ▶ Potatoes? The skins should be avoided, according to NIH; the inside of the potato is fine.



- ▶ Beans? Avoid soybeans and their products like tofu. The NIH diet also says to avoid red kidney beans, lima beans, navy beans, pinto beans, and cowpeas.



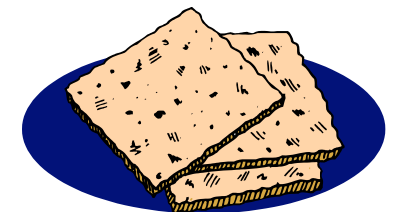
# So, what can I eat??



- ▶ Egg whites are fine to eat.
- ▶ Fresh non-cured meat from the butcher; up to 5-6 ounces per day. A 3-ounce serving is the size of a deck of cards.
- ▶ Grains and cereals and breads, up to 4 servings per day. A serving is one slice of bread or one-half cup uncooked oatmeal.
- ▶ Matzo. Also homemade bread made with non-iodized salt and oil instead of butter or milk. Some commercial breads are okay—read the label.



- ▶ And there's more



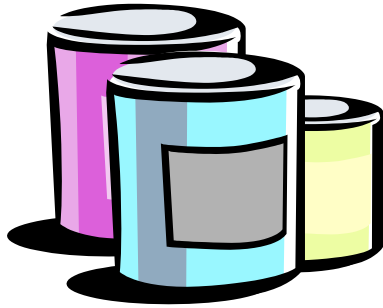


# So, what else can I eat?



- ▶ Fresh fruits and vegetables, washed well. Also frozen vegetables that don't have salt or other high-iodine ingredients added:

- Be careful about frozen peas. Most have salt added



- ▶ Canned peaches, pears, pineapples, and other fruit.

- ▶ Unsalted peanut butter and other nut butters. Some people like to put it in a food processor, add a half teaspoon noniodized salt, 1 tablespoon vegetable oil and 2 tablespoons of white sugar.





## So, what else can I eat?

- Coffee or tea, if non-instant (due to preservative in some instant brands)
- Popcorn popped in vegetable oil or air popped
  - Use non-iodized salt
- Unsalted nuts
- Some baby foods
- More on the next page



# And, what else can I eat?

- Sugar, jelly, jam, honey, real maple syrup
- Fresh and dried herbs
- Black pepper
- Vegetable oils
- Vinegar
- Clear soda, diet soda, lemonade (not pink lemonade)



# And, what else can I eat?



- ▶ Beer, wine, other alcohol
  - Avoid cooking wines, because they contain salt.
- ▶ Homemade foods. Eliminate or substitute ingredients in your own favorite recipes.
- ▶ Use the FREE ***ThyCa Low-Iodine Cookbook***.



It has more than 250 tasty recipes from more than 100 ThyCa volunteers, plus snack and meal ideas and other tips. Expanded 7th edition coming soon.

Download the cookbook at  
**[www.thyca.org](http://www.thyca.org)**





# Final Tip – Plan Ahead

- Bake bread and make rolls from the same recipe and freeze them.
- Have some natural peanut butter on hand.
- Keep jelly in the house.
- Buy Matzos.
- Make homemade chicken broth and freeze it.
- Stock up on pasta and frozen vegetables.
- Buy non-iodized salt.
  - EMPTY ALL YOUR SALT SHAKERS AND REPLACE WITH SAFE SALT!!
- Shop the perimeter of the store...fresh fruits, vegetables, safe cuts of meat.



For more information and the  
**FREE Low-Iodine Cookbook**, visit

[www.thyca.org](http://www.thyca.org)

**Thank You**