Low-Iodine Diet Guidelines — Summary

ThyCa: Thyroid Cancer Survivors’ Association, Inc.

Key Points

• This is a Low-Iodine Diet, NOT a No-Iodine Diet or an Iodine-Free Diet. The goal is under 50 mcg iodine per day.
• The diet is for a short time period, usually for the 2 weeks (14 days) before a radioactive iodine scan or treatment.
• Avoid foods high in iodine (over 20 mcg per serving). Eat any foods low in iodine (up to 5 mcg per serving). Limit the quantity of foods moderate in iodine (5 to 20 mcg per serving).
• Read the ingredient lists on labels of packaged foods. Check with your physician about medications you’re taking.

Not Allowed—Avoid These Foods and Ingredients

• Iodized salt, sea salt, and any foods containing iodized salt and sea salt.
• Seafood and sea products (fish, shellfish, seaweed, seaweed tablets, carrageenan, agar-agar, alginate, nori and other sea-based foods or ingredients).
• Dairy products of any kind (milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, ice cream).
• Egg yolks or whole eggs or foods containing whole eggs.
• Bakery products containing iodine/iodate dough conditioners or high-iodine ingredients. Low-iodine homemade and commercial baked goods are fine.
• Red Dye #3. (E127 in the United Kingdom)
• Most Chocolate (due to milk content). Cocoa powder and some dark chocolates are allowed.
• Some molasses (if sulfured, such as blackstrap molasses). Unsulfured molasses, which is more common, is okay. Sulfur is a term used on labels and does not relate to iodine.
• Soybeans and soybean products such as tofu, TVP, soy milk, soy sauce. The NIH diet says to avoid some other beans: red kidney beans, lima beans, navy beans, pinto beans, and cowpeas.
• On some diets, rhubarb and potato skins (inside of the potato is fine).
• Iodine-containing vitamins and food supplements.
• If you’re taking a medication containing iodine, check with your physician.

Allowed Foods and Ingredients

• Fruits except rhubarb and maraschino cherries (with Red Dye #3 or E127 in the United Kingdom).
• Vegetables: preferably raw or frozen without salt, except soybeans and (according to NIH diet) a few other beans.
• Unsalted nuts and unsalted nut butters.
• Whites of eggs.
• Fresh meats up to 6 ounces a day.
• Grain and cereal products up to 4 servings per day, provided they have no high-iodine ingredients.
• Pasta, provided it has no high-iodine ingredients.
• Sugar, jelly, jam, honey, maple syrup.
• Black pepper, fresh or dried herbs and spices.
• Oils. All vegetable oils, including soy oil.
• Sodas (except with Red Dye #3 or E127 in the UK), cola, diet cola, non-instant coffee, non-instant tea, beer, wine, other alcoholic beverages, lemonade, fruit juices.
• Read the ingredient list on all packaged foods.

Easy Snacks for Home, Work, or Travel

• Fresh fruit or juice
• Dried fruits such as raisins
• Fresh raw vegetables
• Applesauce
• Popcorn
• Unsalted nuts
• Sodas other than those with Red Dye #3 (E127 in the UK)
• Fruit juice
• Unsalted peanut butter or other nut butters (great with apple slices, carrot sticks, crackers, and rice cakes)
• Unsalted Matzo crackers and other unsalted crackers
• Homemade low-iodine bread or muffins

Easy Quick Meals

• Oatmeal toppings-cinnamon, honey, applesauce, maple syrup and walnuts, fruit
• Grilled fresh meat, vegetables, fresh fruit or baked apple
• Salad topped with grilled chicken or beef, oil and vinegar dressing
• "Sandwich" with Matzo crackers, plain peanut butter, jelly

Our thanks to ThyCa’s medical advisors and conference speakers for information and support.

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