

New NHMRC Recommendation: Iodine Supplementation Essential For Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has released a new statement recommending that all pregnant and breastfeeding women take iodine supplements to help make sure that a baby's brain and nervous system develop normally.

Iodine is an essential nutrient required for thyroid hormone synthesis, which is vital to ensure normal development of the brain and nervous system before birth, in babies and young children.

Insufficient iodine can cause learning problems for babies and young children, result in reduced intelligent quotient (IQ), affect their physical development and hearing.

It is therefore very important that pregnant and breastfeeding women get enough iodine.

The NHMRC has released a new statement recommending all women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or considering pregnancy, take an iodine supplement of 150 micrograms (μg) each day.

Supplements of 150 $\mu\text{g}/\text{d}$ of iodine are safe and effective for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

The National Iodine Nutrition Survey (2006) results suggest that Australians do not get enough iodine.

While measures such as the mandatory fortification of bread do increase iodine intake in the general population, iodine requirements during pregnancy and lactation to support the neuropsychological development of the foetus and baby are substantially greater.

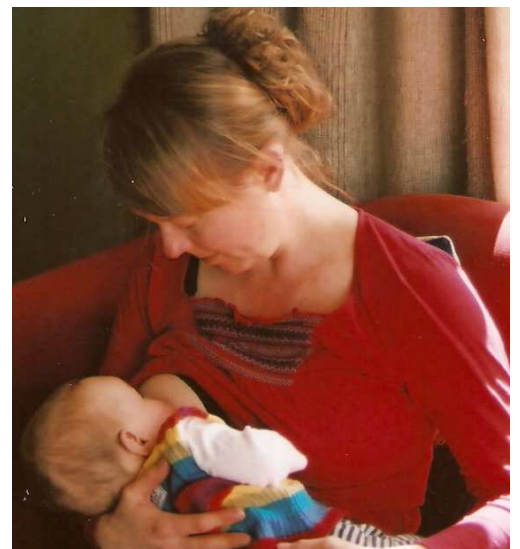
Evidence from recent Tasmanian research has confirmed that iodine fortification of bread is insufficient to meet the needs of pregnant women.*

The Tasmanian Thyroid Advisory Committee and Population Health (Department of Health and Human Services) want to ensure that all health professionals in Tasmania are aware of the need for pregnant and breastfeeding women to take iodine supplements in accordance with NHMRC advice.

Currently there are no specific commercial iodine supplements on the market. However, there are a number of commercial vitamin and mineral supplements designed for pregnancy and lactation that have the recommended amount (or close to) of iodine. It is hoped that increased demand for an iodine only supplement will lead to increased availability over time.

Further information including a literature review can be viewed on the NHMRC website by using the link below:
http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/new45_syn.htm.

For further information about this matter please do not hesitate to contact Judy Seal, Principal Advisor, Public Health Nutrition on 6222 7731 or via email judy.seal@dhhs.tas.gov.au.



* Burgess JR, Seal JA, Stilwell GM, Reynolds J, Taylor ER, Parameswaran V. A case for universal salt iodisation to correct iodine deficiency in pregnancy: another salutary lesson from Tasmania. *The Medical Journal Of Australia* 2007; 186:574-576