

# Iodine is important for the normal development of a baby's brain and nervous system



**A daily supplement that includes 150 micrograms of iodine is recommended for women when planning pregnancy, during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.**

**Women with thyroid conditions should talk to their doctor before taking a supplement.**

## Why is iodine important?

Iodine is an essential nutrient that is vital for the healthy development of the brain and nervous system before birth, in babies and young children. Iodine helps the development of coordination, alertness and the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. For this reason, it is important that women get enough iodine before conception, during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

## How much iodine do pregnant and breastfeeding women need?

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) recommend that women have 220 micrograms of iodine per day when pregnant and 270 micrograms per day when breastfeeding.

As dietary intake is unlikely to be sufficient, a supplement that includes 150 micrograms of iodine is recommended for women when planning pregnancy, during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

Supplements containing iodine are available from pharmacies and supermarkets. It is

## What are the main messages for women?

**150**  
MICROGRAMS (µg)  
**PER DAY**



Pregnant and breastfeeding women in Australia are not getting enough iodine through diet alone.

A daily supplement that includes 150 micrograms of iodine is recommended for women when planning pregnancy, during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

Women with pre-existing thyroid conditions should talk to their doctor before taking a supplement.



Supplements containing iodine are available from pharmacies and supermarkets. Check that the supplement contains 150 micrograms of iodine. There is no benefit to taking more than 150 micrograms of iodine.



- Bread, eggs, dairy, iodised salt and seafood are the main dietary sources of iodine in Australia.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women should have no more than two serves of cooked seafood per week due to the high levels of mercury present in some fish.

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### **Why do women need more iodine before conception, during pregnancy and while breastfeeding?**

Humans store iodine in the thyroid and in pregnancy the thyroid is very active, producing about 50% more thyroid hormones. Women need extra iodine while they are pregnant to produce enough hormones to support the healthy development of the fetus.

Thyroid activity returns to normal when breastfeeding but an iodine supplement is recommended because breast fed infants get all of their iodine from breastmilk.

As it can take time to build up the higher level of nutrients needed for a baby's healthy development, an iodine supplement is also recommended when women are planning pregnancy. If a woman is not getting enough iodine before pregnancy she may not have sufficient stores to support the fetus' needs in the later stages of pregnancy.

### **Are pregnant and breastfeeding women in Australia getting enough iodine?**

No. Pregnant and breastfeeding women need extra iodine and most foods in Australia contain only small amounts. This means it is difficult for pregnant and breastfeeding women to get enough iodine through food alone.

The general population of Australia gets enough iodine due to the fortification of bread with iodine since 2009.

### **When should women take iodine supplements?**

Women should take iodine supplements when planning pregnancy, during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. If pregnancy is not planned, women should start taking an iodine supplement as soon as possible after finding out they are pregnant.

### **Which foods contain iodine?**

In addition to fortified bread, other dietary sources of iodine are eggs, dairy and iodised salt.

Seafood is also a good source of iodine, but pregnant and breastfeeding women should limit intake to two serves of cooked seafood per week due to the high levels of mercury in some fish.

While women can obtain a good proportion of iodine through a healthy diet, recent research

indicates that it is not enough when pregnant or breastfeeding.

A daily supplement that includes 150 micrograms of iodine can provide the extra iodine that women need before and during pregnancy, and while breastfeeding.

### **Further information**

[NHMRC Public Statement: Iodine Supplementation for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women](#)

[RANZCOG Statement: Vitamin and Mineral Supplementation in Pregnancy](#)

[National Pregnancy Care Guidelines](#)

### **Resources for women**

[NSW Health - Having a baby book \(available in 20 languages online\)](#)

[Raising Children Network - Iodine: what you need to know](#)

[Health Direct - Vitamins and nutrition in pregnancy](#)

[NSW Food Authority - Food safety in pregnancy](#)