Iodine is a critically important nutrient that we all need. In women and men, iodine is used by the thyroid to produce T3 and T4 hormones, which manage metabolism.[1] Iodine also supports digestion, bone development, muscle control, and heart and brain function. For women, iodine is necessary for an optimal reproductive system, healthy breast tissue, successful pregnancies, nutritional lactation, and for hormone production in the ovaries. Women who are deficient in iodine may see weak results during and after pregnancy. Here, we’ll take an in-depth look at the importance of iodine for women’s health.

The Top 5 Reasons Women Need Iodine

- Ensures a healthy pregnancy for both mother and fetus
- Adds to the nutritional value of breast milk for brain, bone, and muscle development in infants
- Necessary for overall breast health
- Nutritionally supports the thyroid and metabolism
- Required for the ovaries to produce estrogen and progesterone

How Much Iodine Do Women Need?
A woman’s iodine requirements depend on whether or not she is pregnant or breastfeeding. The Food and Nutrition Board at the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies developed the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI). These reference tables list intake levels ranging from what is recommended to what is tolerable. The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for iodine in an adult woman is 150 mcg – the same as a man’s.

A woman going through pregnancy, however, will need at least 220-250 mcg from the time she becomes pregnant until she gives birth. The RDA becomes even higher while a woman is breastfeeding, to around 250-290 mcg. This higher amount supplies an infant with the Adequate Intake (AI) of iodine, which is 110 mcg during the first six months, and the RDA of iodine which is 130 mcg from 7-12 months of age. An adequate Intake simply means that there isn’t enough evidence to establish an RDA, so a level is determined for nutritional adequacy.[1] These recommendations may change slightly if your baby starts eating. Please get a healthcare provider’s opinion for further guidance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Stage</th>
<th>Dosage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18+</td>
<td>150 mcg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pregnant or Lactating Women</td>
<td>220-250 mcg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breastfeeding Women</td>
<td>250-290 mcg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infants birth-6 months</td>
<td>110 mcg (if not breastfeeding)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infants 7-12 months</td>
<td>130 mcg (if not breastfeeding)</td>
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**Iodine and Women’s Hormonal Health**

Not only is a woman’s hormonal health dependent on her thyroid, but it also relies on hormone production in her reproductive organs. The ovaries require almost as much iodine as the thyroid, which is why iodine and women’s health is so critically linked.

Ovaries are the primary reproductive organs in a woman’s body. Also known as gonads – like the testes in a male’s body – they are a woman’s primary reproductive organs. This name is given to both ovaries and testes because of their ability to produce gametes, also known as sex cells – the eggs and the sperm.[2]

Ovaries also have the distinction of being endocrine glands, since they secrete the hormones estrogen and progesterone – the two primary female reproductive hormones that are crucial for healthy menstruation, fertility, and pregnancy. When an iodine deficiency occurs in the ovaries, just like in the thyroid, hormone production is compromised.

This decline in hormone production within the ovaries can have a profound effect on a woman’s reproductive health and the functions associated with the thyroid. Estrogen dominance is a condition in which a woman can have too little, enough, or too much estrogen, but lacks the progesterone to balance its effects. Even if a woman technically has low estrogen, she can have symptoms of estrogen dominance if she doesn’t have any progesterone. Estrogen dominance
can result in breast tenderness and cause the uterine lining to thicken. Thickened uterine lining causes heavier periods. Iodine, as recommended by a healthcare professional, may help promote hormonal balance, and encourage a light, even menstrual cycle.[3]

Iodine, Ovarian Health, and PCOS

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), which translates to “many cysts,” is a common disorder usually occurring during a woman’s reproductive years, in which multiple cysts or benign tumors grow on a woman’s ovaries. Being iodine-deficient is one risk factor for developing PCOS. The cysts are initially harmless, but can eventually contribute to an imbalance of hormones. PCOS can cause complications during menstruation and make it more challenging for a woman to get pregnant.

PCOS is more common in obese or overweight individuals. Some research suggests that PCOS symptoms can decrease with weight loss. Untreated, PCOS may also lead to other health issues such as heart disease and diabetes.[4]

Iodine and Breast Health

Like the thyroid, since breast tissue needs ample supplies of iodine, a deficiency in this nutrient in women can compromise breast health. An inadequate amount of iodine can cause estrogen levels in breast tissue to rise. This hormonal increase can cause microcysts in breast tissue, which may eventually lead to fibrocystic disease. These cysts are often easily detected with self-examinations and are generally benign. However, iodine-deficient breast tissue is susceptible to lipid oxidation, which can contribute to other health issues, including breast cancer.[5]

Although there is no direct evidence that the chances of developing breast cancer are reduced by adding more iodine to your diet, research has shown that cases of this illness were significantly lower in Eastern cultures where women ingested large amounts of iodine-rich seaweed. These studies have led to the belief that iodine may be a powerful antioxidant.[6]

Iodine Deficiency and Pregnancy

Iodine deficiency during pregnancy can cause serious problems ranging from lower IQ in the baby to developmental delays or miscarriage. It’s fairly well known that a diet rich in vitamin D and folic acid is important during pregnancy. There are still many women, however, who are unaware of how critical iodine is during and even after pregnancy, especially for breastfeeding moms.[7]

When a mother’s iodine levels are low, she is unable to supply enough of this nutrient to stimulate the growth of the thyroid in her developing fetus. Since the thyroid is responsible for making hormones needed for bone development, muscle control, and brain function, a lack of iodine can impair the development of these systems in the fetus.

A pregnant and nursing woman can become increasingly deficient in iodine as she supplies much of what she has to
her developing baby. This supplementation to the fetus can require more iodine for the mother to stay healthy herself.[8]

**Iodine Nutrition for Breastfeeding**

Breast milk is best for babies for many reasons, including its nutritional superiority, convenience, and the psychological bonding that it creates between mother and her infant. Although breast milk has been labeled, “the perfect food” by healthcare professionals, it can be imperfect if the mother is not getting enough vitamins and minerals, including adequate levels of iodine, to provide and nutritious useful food source.[9]

An optimal amount of iodine in breast milk provides maximum thyroid hormone storage and ensures the best brain and neurological development during infancy. The recommended amount of iodine for lactating mothers is 250 mcg. This amount of iodine in breast milk ensures that the infant’s iodine requirement is sufficient to avoid postpartum deficiency of this nutrient.[10]

**Iodine and Menopause**

Menopause takes place when there is a decline in the production of estrogen in a woman’s body and her menstrual cycle stops. This lack of estrogen causes common menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, mood swings, and osteoporosis – a condition in which bone mass decreases causing bones to become brittle, making them more susceptible to fractures. During perimenopause and menopause, the thyroid and ovaries make less of these hormones compared to pre-menopause.

Many women opt for estrogen replacement therapy to supplement what their ovaries can no longer provide. However, there have been links to adverse health conditions in women using this type of replacement therapy. Iodine supplementation, therefore, may be a more natural way to encourage a normal supply of hormones in the thyroid and ovaries.[9]

**Iodine and Hair Loss in Women**

The hormones produced in the thyroid encourage healthy hair, teeth, and bones. An iodine deficiency, therefore, may affect hair growth and quality, and may even promote hair loss. Some women experience hair loss after pregnancy, and also after menopause. This hair loss may be related to the amount of iodine needed to sustain a healthy infant which may result in a deficiency in the mother.

One of the more notable studies inadvertently involved sheep farmers. These farmers noticed sheep consuming grass on low-iodine soil produced poor-quality wool, with sparse hair growth. Farmers whose sheep ate iodine-rich plants, however, produced high-quality, high-volume wool. It’s possible, then, to relate hair loss in humans with an iodine deficiency.

**Is It Possible to Take Too Much Iodine?**
Yes. Although a lack of iodine can lead to deficiency, too much iodine can lead to thyroid issues, most commonly hyperthyroidism. This happens when the thyroid produces more hormones than your body needs. Women and people over the age of 60 are more prone to this type of thyroid issue. An autoimmune disorder called Graves' disease is one of the main causes of hyperthyroidism, and the consumption of too much iodine can contribute to developing this condition.[11]

Symptoms of hyperthyroidism may include the following:[12]

- Mood swings
- Nervousness
- Irritability
- Fatigue
- Trouble sleeping
- Muscle weakness
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Intolerance to heat
- Hand tremors
- Diarrhea
- Sudden weight loss
- The development of an enlarged thyroid, or goiter

Although excess iodine may affect reproductive organs in men, it's unclear if the same is true for a woman's reproductive organs. In some studies, ovary hypo-functioning, or functioning at lower levels, occurred with a potassium iodide supplementation of 100 excess iodine (EI) – 100 times the recommended dose – but this level was still tolerable to the thyroid. Women who took a 500 EI supplement resulted in hyperfunctioning ovaries and altered the thyroid's ability to function normally.[13]

What's the Best Way to Get Iodine?

Iodine is available naturally through food sources or as a supplement. Although it's recommended you follow an organic, iodine-rich diet, some circumstances require you take iodine supplements.

Best Food Sources of Iodine

A number of foods contain iodine. Sea vegetables like kelp, arame, hiziki, kombu, and wakame are all potent in iodine. Kelp alone has the highest iodine content of any food, offering four times the daily requirement. I, however, try to avoid sea vegetables since contamination can be an issue.

Other foods with high levels of iodine are cranberries and raw, organic cheese. You can also add organic yogurt, navy beans, strawberries, and potatoes to your grocery list. All of these foods can be easily incorporated into your daily menu. Try sprinkling these foods in salads, blending them into a healthy shake, or enjoying them by themselves.

If you're looking for some iodine-rich seasoning, Himalayan crystal salt yields the benefits of magnesium and other
minerals as well as iodine. This unrefined, organic salt is mined naturally from caves and left untouched to preserve its healthy minerals. It's also easy for the body to absorb, unlike table salt which undergoes a refining process that strips it of nutrition and adds chemicals for harsher digestion.

Iodine Supplementation for Women

Supplementation is a great way to achieve adequate iodine levels in the body – especially for women. Not all supplements, however, are created equal. The safest and most effective iodine supplements are transformative nano-colloidal detoxified iodine, or nascent iodine, Lugol’s solution iodine, and potassium iodide.

Lugol’s contains 85% distilled water, 10% potassium iodide, and 5% elemental iodine. This non-toxic, mono elemental-based iodine can encourage healthy breast tissue. Potassium iodide is another supplement which is known as the thyroid mineral and is usually available in tablet form. This supplemental mineral helps regulate iodine levels in the thyroid to help prevent hypo and hyperthyroidism.[12]

The best way, however, to get the required amount of iodine into your body is a nascent iodine supplement. The body absorbs it faster and more efficiently than sodium and potassium iodide. If you need a high-quality, organic nascent iodine supplement, try Detoxadine®. Detoxadine is a premium-quality, deep-earth sourced nascent iodine supplement that helps support thyroid health, the immune system, and more.†

Your Story

Have you experienced iodine deficiency? Have you experienced any postpartum side effects related to iodine? Has an iodine supplement helped you? We’d love to hear about your iodine experience. Tell us your story in the comments section below.

▼ References (13)


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Iodine deficiency is a common world health problem. The most recognized form of deficiency is goiter. Additionally, across the globe iodine deficiency is thought to be the most common preventable cause of mental retardation. Early in the twentieth century, iodine deficiency was common in the US and Canada, but the addition of iodine to salt has improved public health. The addition of iodine to salt is required in Canada. Iodine is LIKELY SAFE for most people when taken by mouth at recommended amounts or when applied to the skin appropriately using approved products. Iodine can cause significant side effects in some people. Common side effects include nausea and stomach pain, runny nose, headache, metallic taste, and diarrhea. Iodine and Women’s Hormonal Health. Not only is a woman’s hormonal health dependent on her thyroid, but it also relies on hormone production in her reproductive organs. The ovaries require almost as much iodine as the thyroid, which is why iodine and women’s health is so critically linked. Ovaries are the primary reproductive organs in a woman’s body. Although there is no direct evidence that the chances of developing breast cancer are reduced by adding more iodine to your diet, research has shown that cases of this illness were significantly lower in Eastern cultures where women ingested large amounts of iodine-rich seaweed. These studies have led to the belief that iodine may be a powerful antioxidant.[6].