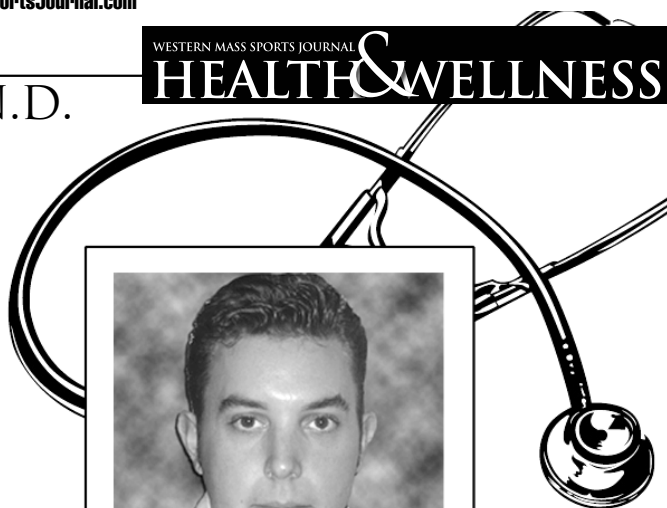


THE IMPORTANCE OF IODINE



Dr. Frank Aieta, N.D.

When people hear the word "iodine," many immediately think of table salt that contains iodine, but few understand the relationship between this essential mineral and health.

For more than 100 years, iodine has been known as the element necessary for thyroid hormone production. As I've stated before, our thyroid is our body's gas pedal. It produces hormones that tell our cells how quickly to use the calories that we take in from food. In other words, it essentially controls our metabolism.

If the thyroid gland does not receive adequate iodine, a condition known as goiter (enlarged thyroid) can occur. In this country, the recommended daily allowance for iodine is 150 micrograms a day. That is the minimum amount required to prevent the formation of a goiter, but it is far below the amount needed for a properly functioning thyroid, cancer prevention, an optimal immune system and other vital functions of the body.

Yes, you heard correctly, proper supplementation of iodine can help prevent cancer. If a doctor diagnoses a patient with a slow thyroid, or hypothyroidism, he or she traditionally prescribes the patient a synthetic thyroid replacement called Synthroid. I have never once seen a medical doctor even mention to a patient that a possible reason for the slow thyroid could be iodine deficiency.

In my private practice, I can honestly say almost 40 percent of the patients that I see have some degree of hypothyroidism. Proper iodine supplementation, rather than relying on a drug, can cure a majority of them.

Iodine is also concentrated in women's breast tissue, and a lack of the mineral can lead to a

condition called fibrocystic breast disease (painful breasts with nodules and cysts). A surprisingly large number of American women have fibrocystic breast disease, and the longer this disease exists, the higher the potential risk for development of breast cancer.

My main treatment for this disease — if you haven't already guessed — is iodine, if the patient is deficient. Usually, within less than six months, iodine alone can cure this condition.

Much of the research on iodine and its relationship to disease comes from observations of people in areas where iodine intake is the highest. For example, it has been estimated that the mainland Japanese population ingests approximately 13,800 micrograms per person of iodine per day, which is more than 100 times the recommended daily allowance. Japanese people from the coastal areas ingest even more than that. They receive much of their iodine from fresh seafood and seaweed, which is known to concentrate iodine.

These same populations have remarkably lower levels of breast, endometrial, prostate, thyroid and ovarian cancer. In addition, there is a significantly lower amount of hypothyroidism and fibrocystic breast disease in Japanese women who consume more iodine.

Animal research has also shown that in an iodine-deficient state, animal breast tissue will show signs of developing breast cancer. One study showed that women who have hypothyroidism and are taking only a thyroid hormone to correct it develop breast cancer twice as frequently than in women not on thyroid hormones.

Unfortunately there are only a few doctors, including myself, in all of Massachusetts and Con-

necticut who will actually test for an iodine deficiency. Part of the reason is that many are unaware of much of the research and are so used to prescribing drugs instead of looking for nutrient deficiencies as a cause.

Before I recommend iodine supplementation to anyone, I will run a specialized urinalysis called an iodine-loading test. The patient takes a specific dose of iodine, and then I measure the amount of iodine excreted in the urine over the first 24 hours. If the patient has enough iodine already, he or she should excrete over 90 percent of the iodine taken in. Anything less would indicate an iodine deficiency.

I will typically recommend an iodine supplement with a specific dose based on the patient's level of their deficiency. Some common symptoms that I have seen resolved in many patients after iodine supplementation include fatigue, fibrocystic breast, water retention, headaches, ovarian cysts, uterine fibroids, bowel problems, dry skin and eyes, heartburn, weight gain, poor memory and elevated cholesterol.

If you are looking to improve your health, reduce your risk of a variety of cancers and enhance your thyroid function, find a physician (preferably a naturopathic physician) who is willing to check you for an iodine deficiency and properly treat you.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board-certified and licensed naturopathic physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

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