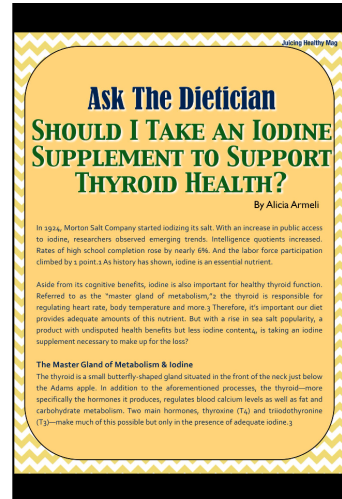


Should I Take an Iodine Supplement to Support Thyroid Health?

By Alicia Armeli

In 1924, Morton Salt Company started iodizing its salt. With an increase in public access to iodine, researchers observed emerging trends. Intelligence quotients increased. Rates of high school completion rose by nearly 6%. And the labor force participation climbed by 1 point.¹ As history has shown, iodine is an essential nutrient.

Aside from its cognitive benefits, iodine is also important for healthy thyroid function. Referred to as the “master gland of metabolism,”² the thyroid is responsible for regulating heart rate, body temperature and more.³ Therefore, it’s important our diet provides adequate amounts of this nutrient. But with a rise in sea salt popularity, a product with undisputed health benefits but *less iodine content*⁴, is taking an iodine supplement necessary to make up for the loss?



The Master Gland of Metabolism & Iodine

The thyroid is a small butterfly-shaped gland situated in the front of the neck just below the Adams apple. In addition to the aforementioned processes, the thyroid—more specifically the hormones it produces, regulates blood calcium levels as well as fat and carbohydrate metabolism. Two main hormones, thyroxine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3)—make much of this possible but only in the presence of adequate iodine.³

Low iodine levels can negatively affect the thyroid and, although more common worldwide versus in the US, can lead to hypothyroidism or an underactive thyroid.⁵ Symptoms can include fatigue, cold hands and feet, depression, hypercholesterolemia, and forgetfulness.^{3 6}

Iodine Food Sources

Iodine cannot be produced within the body so it must come from diet. It’s found in the water and soil but in varying amounts. Therefore, food grown in one region may have more or less iodine than that grown in another. Commonly known food sources of iodine include⁷:

Food Source	Iodine in micrograms (µg)
Seaweed (1 g)	Varies 16-2984
Yogurt, plain, low-fat (1 cup)*	75
Milk, reduced fat (1 cup)*	56
Shrimp (3 oz)	35
Egg, large	24
Tuna, canned (3 oz)	17
Prunes, dried (5)	13

*Note: The iodine in dairy is partly due to iodine feed supplements and iodophor equipment sanitizing agents used.

To Supplement Or Not To Supplement...

As with other nutrients, I always encourage food first over taking a supplemental form; however, if you don’t find yourself eating many of the abovementioned foods, a multivitamin containing iodine may be beneficial. The Institute of Medicine⁸ recommends healthy males and females 14 years of age and older to consume 150 micrograms (µg) of iodine per day. Since iodine is critical during fetal

and infant development, this recommendation increases to 220µg/day and 290µg/d for pregnant and lactating women respectively.

It's important to note that taking too much iodine has its risks as well and symptoms can often mimic hypothyroidism.⁷ Those with pre-existing thyroid conditions and iodine deficiencies should also take caution, as they are more vulnerable to the negative effects of high iodine intake.⁸

Other Thyroid Supporting Nutrients

Iodine is significant to thyroid health, but so are many other nutrients. Selenium is a component of enzymes responsible for producing thyroid hormones.⁹ Foods containing selenium include seafood and Brazil nuts.

Although more discovery is needed, vitamin D may also be essential for thyroid function. A study published in *Thyroid* found individuals with an autoimmune type of hypothyroidism called Hashimoto's Disease to have insufficient vitamin D levels in comparison to healthy individuals.¹⁰ Although correlation doesn't imply causation, eating a diet rich in vitamin D may help to maintain thyroid health. Eating fatty fish like sardines and salmon or exposing bare skin to sunlight so your body can produce it for you, are both viable ways to enjoy getting vitamin D.

Other vitamin deficiencies that may influence thyroid function are iron, vitamin A, zinc, and vitamin B12.^{3 11}

My take on thyroid supporting nutrients is this, try to obtain them through a whole foods diet versus a taking a pill. However, if you do choose to supplement, it's best to first have open dialogue with your physician regarding your current health, medical history, and lifestyle to know which supplements will work best with your body.

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