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.

Iodine is an essential nutrient that humans need in small quantities. The thyroid uses iodine to produce hormones vital to ensure normal development of the brain and nervous system before birth, in babies and young children. For this reason, it is important that women get enough iodine before conception, during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Iodine supplements are usually combined with other vitamins and minerals in a multivitamin supplement, and are available from pharmacies and supermarkets.

Why is iodine important?

Iodine is needed for the healthy development of a baby’s brain and nervous system.

Iodine helps the development of coordination, alertness and the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

Why do women need more iodine during pre-conception, pregnancy and breastfeeding?

Humans store iodine in the thyroid and in pregnancy the thyroid is particularly active.

What are the main messages for women?

- 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.
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, a daily supplement including 150 micrograms of iodine is also recommended when women are planning pregnancy. If iodine intake is inadequate before pregnancy, the mother's stores may not be sufficient to support the fetus' needs in the later stages of pregnancy.

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

No. Most foods in Australia contain only small amounts of iodine, making it 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. No. Pregnant and breastfeeding women need extra iodine but 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.

**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 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 recommended that women check that the supplement contains 150 micrograms of iodine. There is no benefit to taking more than 150 micrograms of iodine.

**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 with 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