



Everything okay with iodine?

Eating less salt is good, refraining from iodized salt is not. Without iodized salt, the risk of iodine deficiency increases.

Fleur de sel, sea salt and Himalayan salt – we are spoiled for choice at the supermarket shelves. However, the subtle but crucial difference is made by a small piece of information in the list of ingredients: “with iodine”. Iodine is a vital trace element that must be ingested with food.

Why iodine?

Shaped like a butterfly, the thyroid is located directly below the larynx. Its most important task is to produce the hormones thyroxine and triiodothyronine. These thyroid hormones play a key role in metabolism and are necessary for our growth, bone formation and the development of our nervous system. If we are not sufficiently supplied with iodine, the thyroid may not produce enough hormones, leading to hypothyroidism. Those affected often suffer from excessive fatigue, weight gain and concentration difficulties.

Unnecessary as a goiter

In the effort to compensate for the continuing iodine deficiency, the walnut-sized thyroid can grow to the size of a grapefruit. Presently in Germany, disease progression is mostly mild and barely visible. The enlarged thyroid is known as a struma or more commonly as a “goiter”. If the goiter produces insufficient amounts of hormones, this leads to hypothyroidism. However, if it produces more than required, this can lead to hyperthyroidism. The symptoms then range from weight loss and increased appetite to insomnia.

Foods rich in iodine include



Sea fish

including herring, pollack, cod and plaice



Algae

Iodine concentrations in Algae can be particularly high and fluctuate, which is why the information on the package regarding iodine concentrations and maximum consumption amounts must be taken into account.



Milk, cheese, yoghurt



Bread, sausage and ready-to-eat products

Pay attention to iodised salt (list of ingredients!)



Iodised salt

Low iodine intake possible

Iodine supply in Germany has improved since the mid-1980s. An important reason for this is the measure taken to enrich table salt with iodine. However, current data from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) show that iodine intake in Germany is still not optimal. Nearly 30 % of adults and 44 % of children and adolescents are at risk of an insufficient iodine intake.

One possible cause: in this country, manufacturers can decide for themselves whether or not they use iodised table salt in their products. A study conducted by the Justus Liebig University Giessen indicates that fewer and fewer bakeries and butchers have been using iodised salt in the last ten years. Currently, only about 30 % of industrially and artisanally produced foods contain the fortified salt. But according to the BfR’s model calculations, a good iodine supply is only possible if around 40 % of these foods are produced with iodised salt.

Good sources of iodine

We may consciously select foods containing iodine to be well supplied with the trace element. However, fruit, vegetables and cereals, for example, are low in iodine because our soils contain very little iodine. Only few foods naturally contain the element in relevant quantities. Iodised table salt is one of the few sources rich in iodine. From the BfR’s point of view, this is the salt of choice, both in our own kitchens and in food production. With that in mind: if you use salt, then use iodised salt! ■

More information:
www.bfr.bund.de/en > A-Z-Index: Iodine



Hip fashion accessory

“Chokers” have made a comeback on the catwalks – they are historically part of many traditional costumes. In their original function, they were not only intended to adorn women’s necks: struma bands. These were wide shawls or pieces of jewellery that fit tightly around the neck and were used to hide a goiter.