

MEDIA RELEASE



The Australian
Thyroid Foundation Ltd

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A slice of bread a day can help to keep the doctor away

All Australian bread to be fortified with iodine to combat a growing health problem

The Australian Thyroid Foundation (ATF), Australia's peak patient advocacy group for people with thyroid disorders, today welcomes the mandatory fortification of iodised salt in bread.

Australia's food regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), will officially launch a mandatory Iodine Fortification Standard from 9 October 2009. This Standard means the addition of iodised salt will now become a compulsory ingredient in all bread manufacturing.

"From today, all bread manufacturers, except for organic manufacturers, will be required to include iodise salt in bread making," said ATF President, Ms Beverley Garside.

"Iodine is absolutely crucial for a healthy thyroid and brain development and function, so the introduction of this Iodine Fortification Standard could not have come at a better time," she said.

Like iron and calcium, iodine is an essential micronutrient which all Australians need for proper growth and development, however almost one in two are not getting enough iodine in their diets.

"Recent studies have shown that more than 50 cent of children and pregnant women are currently iodine deficient," said Professor Creswell Eastman AM, a leading Endocrinologist and the ATF's Chief Medical Adviser.

The average Australian child needs 120 micrograms of iodine per day for effective brain development and function, whilst adults require 150 micrograms per day to ensure a healthy thyroid. For pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers, this requirement increases to 250 micrograms per day.

"The mandatory fortification of iodised salt in bread will increase the individual's intake of iodine by approximately 46 micrograms per day, the equivalent amount of iodine found in a 300 ml glass of milk. This level of additional iodine is consistent with the body's iodine requirements," said Professor Eastman.

When it comes to iodine deficiency awareness, however, Professor Eastman believes Australia lags behind other western countries, such as the United States.

"Iodine deficiency has been overlooked and ignored in the past by Australian public health authorities. Whilst the mandatory fortification of iodised salt in bread is a step in the right direction and will improve the situation by increasing iodine intake in children by around a third, it will not fix iodine deficiency in this country," said Professor Eastman.

"To ensure Australians are able to receive the adequate levels of iodine needed for good brain development and function and good thyroid health, it is important that other food products, such as cereals and biscuits, are also fortified with iodine," he said.

“Low iodine intake is one of the most important international public health issues, often resulting in lower IQs amongst children and difficulties in conceiving amongst women,” said Ms Garside.

“For pregnant women, not receiving the required dietary intake of iodine becomes an even greater concern, as it may lead to an increased risk of miscarrying or delivering prematurely,” she said.

Whilst seafood, dairy products, and now bread, are the main sources of iodine in Australia – for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, iodine supplements are still recommended.

“I would also encourage all Australians to make the switch and replace all of their current table salts, with iodised salt products, which are available in all leading supermarkets,” Ms Garside concluded.

The increase in iodine intake through mandatory fortification is not expected to disrupt the treatment or health of people currently managing a thyroid condition. Should people be concerned, they are advised to consult their doctor.

The World Health Organisation says that dietary iodine deficiency is the most common worldwide cause of preventable mental deficiency. The Australian Thyroid Foundation welcomes the FSANZ mandatory Iodine Fortification Standard as an important step forward in managing the incidence of iodine deficiency in this country.

Ends

Interviews/commentary available with:

- Beverley Garside, ATF President
- Professor Creswell Eastman, Endocrinologist and ATF Chief Medical Adviser

For media enquiries, please contact:

- Beverley Garside – 0416 269 982
- Tania Jayesuria – 0404 094 744 or 02 8281 3284

About the Australian Thyroid Foundation:

The Australian Thyroid Foundation Ltd. (ATF) was founded in 1995 by a small group of people, all with thyroid conditions, who wanted to provide a support and education service to members and their families.

The ATF is a national not-for-profit organisation which provides many support services for its members and their families and is focused on educating the Australian public about the importance of good thyroid health.

The mission of The Australian Thyroid Foundation Limited is to support and educate members and the community about thyroid disorders.

For further information visit www.thyroidfoundation.com.au