
Executive summary

Background of this advisory report

Regulations and research undergo rapid development

European regulations, legislation and research in the field of vitamins, minerals and trace elements, so-called micro-nutrients, undergo rapid development. For this reason, the minister of Health, Welfare and Sport asked the Health Council of the Netherlands for advice on reconsidering its policy in this area.

The aim of the new policy is to ensure that as many people as possible consume adequate quantities of micronutrients while, at the same time, minimising the risk that people exceed the safe upper level of intake. In this advisory report, the specially appointed Committee outlines the requirements for iodine.

Iodine is essential for the body

Iodine is an essential component of thyroid hormones. These hormones are necessary for normal growth and development and to keep metabolism balanced.

Because foods naturally contain little iodine, it may be added to salt

Iodine is a trace element that occurs naturally in food. Because the amount naturally present in the Netherlands is insufficient, iodine may be added to salt.

Baker's salt, used for baking bread and other baked products, contains more iodine (up to 65 milligrams per kilogram of salt) than iodised salt destined for other foods (up to 25 milligrams per kilogram of salt). Roughly 50% of iodine intake is from bread.

Iodine intake is sufficient

As the title of the advisory report already indicates, the amount of iodine consumed by the Dutch population is sufficient. However, there are a number of gaps in the numbers – there is insufficient data on people who only consume self-baked or organic bread, which may contain non-iodised salt or sea salt.

Developments that may lead to lower intake

The determination of maximum levels for voluntary fortification on a European level may lead to lower iodine intake

In the near future, minimum and maximum levels for voluntary fortification will be agreed upon at a European level. If the maximum level of fortification ends up lower than 65 milligrams per kilogram of salt, iodine intake in the Netherlands will decrease, and the risk of iodine deficiency and goitre will increase.

Efforts to decrease salt consumption lead to lower iodine intake

The current level of iodine intake will drop due to the decrease in salt intake. From a public health standpoint, decreasing salt intake is highly desirable. However, it will be associated with a larger risk of iodine deficiency and goitre if iodine intake is not compensated.

Efforts to address these developments

Ensure that the current Dutch level of fortification of baker's salt remains allowed at a European level

In order to safeguard good iodine supply in the Netherlands, it is of vital importance to continue to allow the current level of iodine fortification for baker's salt at a European level. Therefore, a maximum level for salt fortification with iodine of at least 65 milligrams per kilogram should be strived for.

Monitor iodine intake in the Netherlands

Given the efforts to lower salt consumption in the Netherlands, regularly determining iodine intake and status among the Dutch population is important. Fortification policies can be adjusted based on these data. Given the essential role iodine plays in human development, it is important that particular attention is paid to children during their first year of life and to pregnant or breast-feeding women.

Additional research

Investigate the iodine intake of people who only eat self-baked or organic bread

There are insufficient data to determine whether the iodine intake of people who eat self-baked or organic bread is sufficient. This should be examined separately.

Define dietary reference values for iodine

There are no official dietary reference values for iodine intake in the Netherlands. The Committee recommends defining them.