

Iodine in bread not enough for pregnant women

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(Medical Xpress)—New research from the University of Adelaide shows that iodised salt used in bread is not enough to provide healthy levels of iodine for pregnant women and their unborn children.

The study - led by researchers from the University of Adelaide's Robinson Institute - has prompted calls for pregnant women to keep taking iodine supplements.

"Iodine is an essential element which is important for human brain development and [thyroid function](#)," says one of the lead authors of the study, Associate Professor Vicki Clifton from the University's Robinson Institute and the Lyell McEwin Hospital.

"In 2009, Australian bread producers began a mandatory program of iodine supplementation in bread to help provide a boost to iodine levels in the community. Our study was aimed at determining whether or not that was having a positive impact on iodine levels for pregnant women."

In the study, almost 200 South Australian women were tested throughout their pregnancy and six months after giving birth. The results have been published in the *Nutrition Journal*.

"We found that South Australian women are mildly iodine deficient. Despite the inclusion of iodised salt in bread, women who were not taking an iodine supplement during pregnancy were still suffering from iodine deficiency," Associate Professor Clifton says.

"Those women who were taking a supplement in addition to eating bread with iodised salt were receiving healthy levels of iodine, well within [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) guidelines."

This is the latest study to follow on from the pioneering work of the University's Emeritus Professor Basil Hetzel AC, who began researching iodine deficiency more than 50 years ago at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, in collaboration with the [Papua New Guinea](#) Public Health Department. It revealed very low urine iodine levels and high rates of goitre were associated with a form of [brain damage](#) called 'cretinism'. Professor Hetzel showed that this brain damage could be prevented by correcting the severe iodine deficiency before pregnancy.

"There's a lot of work going on around the world to ensure that pregnant women are receiving enough iodine for the healthy development of their unborn babies," says Professor Hetzel, who is also a lead author on this current study.

"The message is simple: by taking [iodine supplements](#), pregnant women will be able to prevent brain and organ development problems in their babies, and also maintain a healthy level of iodine for themselves."

Professor Hetzel says Australia continues to be a leader in this field, "but there is still very little public understanding about the dangers of [iodine](#) deficiency".

"[Iodine deficiency](#) is now recognised by the WHO as the most common preventable cause of brain damage in the world today," he says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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