

Information about changes to medicines or treatments on the Health Service: **Changes to liothyronine prescribing**

The Health Service is asking doctors to stop or greatly reduce the prescribing of some treatments on prescription. This is because the treatments are:

- Not as safe as other treatments OR
- Not as good (effective) as other treatments OR
- More expensive than other treatments that do the same thing.

One of these medicines is liothyronine (including Armour[®] Thyroid and liothyronine combination products).

This document will explain why the changes are happening and where you can get more information and support.

What is liothyronine?

Liothyronine (sometimes known as T3) is used to treat an underactive thyroid gland. “Underactive” means that the thyroid gland does not work as well as it should.

However, the recommended treatment for an underactive thyroid gland is a medicine called levothyroxine. Levothyroxine is changed to liothyronine in the body.

Why does the Health Service want to reduce prescribing of liothyronine?

There is **not enough evidence to routinely use liothyronine** in the treatment of an underactive thyroid gland, whereas there is **a lot of evidence for the use of levothyroxine**.

The British Thyroid Association (BTA) do not recommend routinely using liothyronine instead of levothyroxine in most patients with an underactive

thyroid. However, they do say that a small number of patients treated with levothyroxine continue to suffer with symptoms and in these cases liothyronine may be considered. In this group of patients the recommendation to use liothyronine should be made to the GP by a *Health Service* endocrine consultant. Recommendations from private healthcare consultants to GPs to prescribe should not occur.

In addition, liothyronine is extremely expensive, so it is not good value for money for most people with an underactive thyroid.

Where can I find more information and support?

- You can speak to your local pharmacist, GP or the person who prescribed the medication to you
- British Thyroid Association (BTA) Management of hypothyroidism FAQ: www.btf-thyroid.org/images/documents/FAQ_for_BTA_Hypothyroidism_Statement.pdf
- The Patient and Client Council can also offer support and advice: <http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net/> or call 0800 917 0222.