



Barium/water soluble contrast swallow (and/or meal)

Information for patients

A barium swallow and water soluble swallow are essentially the same examination, but depending on different factors the doctor may wish to use different forms of contrast media to carry out the examination.

What is a barium/water soluble contrast swallow? (and/ or meal)

It is an X-ray study of your oesophagus and stomach that uses a form of contrast media that aims to identify problems within your upper gastrointestinal tract. The doctor who sent you for this examination will have explained why you need it.

How should I prepare?

You must not eat or drink for eight hours before your appointment time. **This is very important** to ensure accurate results.

If you become very thirsty you may take occasional small sips of water up to two hours before your appointment.

If you are prone to choking on your food please tell the doctor about it when you come for your examination.

Your symptoms

If there have been changes in your health since you saw the doctor who sent you for this test please contact them to let them know.

Diabetes

If you are diabetic and use insulin or other medication you should contact your diabetic nurse who will advise you.

Pregnancy

If you are, or think that you may be, pregnant please call us on 01737 231604 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4pm) and ask to speak to a radiographer or nurse.

This is because X-rays are believed to be relatively more harmful to the unborn child, especially in the earlier stages of pregnancy.

Who will be there?

In the room there will be a consultant radiologist and a radiographer.

What does it involve?

When you arrive you will change into an X-ray gown and then be taken to the X-ray room.

You will be asked to drink some barium solution. This shows on the X-rays giving a good view of your oesophagus and stomach. It is like a thick flavoured milk shake with a mild fruity taste.

The progress of the barium is followed on an X-ray screen and a series of images are taken. You may be asked to turn into different positions and may be standing or lying for parts of the study.

Usually you will also take a teaspoon of fizzy granules with lemon juice - this may be at the start of the examination. This creates gas that expands your stomach and gives better results.

Very rarely you may also be given a small injection to relax the muscles of your stomach, please do not worry if we need to do this. If we do this you will not be able to drive for an hour afterwards as the eye muscles are affected.

The examination will take around 20 minutes.

Are there any risks?

Radiation

We are all exposed to natural background radiation every day of our lives. Each X-ray examination gives us a small additional dose. Everything is done within the X-ray department to minimise this.

Barium

Barium can occasionally go down the 'wrong way' to your lungs. Normally this does not cause any problems. Occasionally treatment with physiotherapy and possibly antibiotics is needed. You are watched carefully during the test to avoid this happening.

After the examination

Once the examination is finished you are free to dress and leave, you may immediately eat and drink. It is important to drink plenty of fluids through-out the day to avoid the barium causing constipation. The white barium paste will make your stools appear white, possibly for a few days. If you had an injection as part of your examination you will not be able to drive for an hour afterwards.

When do I find out the results?

If the examination was requested by your family doctor (GP) then the results will be sent to them. We aim to do this within five days. If the scan was requested by a hospital consultant, the result will be sent to them and will be available at your next appointment.

Further information

If you have any concerns about your examination please contact us (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4pm) and ask to speak to a senior radiographer or nurse.

01737 768511 Ext 2956/6018

Contact us

Diagnostic imaging department
Redhill Surrey RH1 5RH
Tel: 01737 231 604

www.surreyandsussex.nhs.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Telephone: 01737 231 958

Email: pals@sash.nhs.uk

Write to: PALS, East Surrey Hospital
Redhill, Surrey RH1 5RH

You can also ask a member of staff to contact PALS on your behalf.

This information can be made available in other languages and formats, including in larger text. Contact 01737 231 958 for help.

Author: Diagnostic Imaging
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