

Barium swallow *(page 1 of 3)*



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You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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What is a barium swallow?

A barium swallow is an X-ray of the oesophagus (gullet). This part of the body does not show up well on ordinary X-rays. If however the lining of the gut is coated with barium, a white liquid that shows up on X-rays, then much greater detail is obtained.

Are there any side effects or risks?

You will be able to eat and drink normally straight away after the test, and for the first day or so, you should drink plenty of fluids. This will help the barium pass out of your system. Your stools will look white and remain discoloured for the next day or so. Some people may get slightly constipated, and taking a mild laxative should help in this case. Stools containing barium are sometimes difficult to flush from the lavatory pan and might need repeat flushing.

The radiation dose is about the same as the average person receives from background radiation over 8 months. Special precautions are taken to keep the radiation dose to a minimum.

What if I am pregnant?

This examination should not be performed on pregnant women, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Please advise the department if you think you are or might be pregnant.

Is there any special preparation?

Yes, this is very important. On the day before the examination please keep to a light diet. A light diet is one free from any residue or fibre. Fibre swells in the gut and adds bulk to the contents and will need more effort to clear from the digestive tract. Avoid fresh fruits, salads, vegetables and bran. Please continue to take your regular medications as normal, but otherwise please have nothing to eat or drink for 4 hours prior to your appointment, as it is important for the stomach to be empty.

What if I have diabetes?

We try to give patients with diabetes a morning appointment, but unfortunately we are not always aware of patients' full medical history. If you have diabetes and have not been given a morning appointment, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Clinical Radiology

 01722 336262 ext 4196

- If your diabetes is controlled by diet only please follow your normal diet.
- If your diabetes is controlled by tablets - take half the normal dose the night before and omit the morning dose. Take your normal dose with your first meal after the examination.
- If your diabetes is controlled by insulin, omit your morning dose but bring your insulin and some breakfast to the department to have immediately after examination.

Please bring your glucometer with you. If you are an insulin dependent diabetic and have any concerns then please ring the diabetic nurses on 01722 425176 a few days before your appointment.

What do I do when I arrive in the department?

Please report to the receptionist in the X-ray department first, then take a seat in the main reception waiting area. From here you will be collected by a member of the team, who will check your details. You will be shown to a private cubicle where you will be asked to undress and put on a hospital gown. The gown should be done up with the ties at the back. Please bring your own dressing gown with you to wear while you are waiting. You should place your clothes and personal items in one of the bags provided, which you keep with you. You will be called into the X-ray room for the examination as soon as possible, but please bear in mind that the needs other patients may cause a delay.

Who will I see?

In the X-ray room will be a radiologist (an X-ray doctor) who will be directing the examination, a radiographer and usually a radiographer assistant as well.

What happens during the barium examination?

It will take about 20 minutes to do the examination. You will be taken into the X-ray room. You will be asked to drink from a cup containing the barium, a sticky white liquid, which is mildly flavoured and slightly fizzy, one mouthful at a time. This coats the lining of the oesophagus and stomach, so that they show up on the X-ray images. You will be positioned in front of the X-ray camera, standing on a small step attached to the couch in its upright position. The Radiologist watches the monitor and also takes X-ray pictures. In some cases, the Radiologist will tilt the machine slowly backwards so that will be lying horizontally, and more pictures are taken. You may be asked to move into different positions, and you may also be asked to swallow the barium using a straw while lying down.

What happens after the examination?

Barium does not get absorbed by the body and so your stools will appear white for a few days. Sometimes barium can cause constipation, to avoid this you should drink plenty of fluids for at least 3 days after the examination. It may take 2 to 3 days before your normal bowel habit returns. This is normal, and is encouraged by returning to your normal diet. You should be able to resume normal activities straight away.

Can I eat and drink afterwards?

Yes. Please eat and drink normally

Can I drive home?

Yes.

How will I get the results?

After the procedure the images will be examined by the radiologist and a report on the examination will be written and sent to the doctor who referred you. Your doctor will arrange a follow-up appointment.