

Information for adults having a barium small bowel meal examination *(page 1 of 3)*

A small bowel meal is an investigation to look at the middle part of your intestine (the small bowel) for any abnormality.

What is a small bowel meal examination?

A small bowel meal examination is also known as a barium follow-through examination. This is an investigation to examine the middle part of the intestine (called the small bowel) using a special preparation of barium. The small bowel extends from the duodenum (just beyond the stomach) to the ileo-caecal valve (just before the large intestine). You will be asked to drink some white chalky liquid called barium, which shows up on X-ray. X-ray pictures will then be taken at regular intervals until all of the small bowel has been examined.

Are there any risks?

This examination is regarded as a very safe examination. The radiation dose is about the same as the average person receives from background radiation over 12-15 months (Health Protection Agency 'Patient Dose Information 2008'). Special precautions are taken to keep the radiation dose to a minimum.

What if I am pregnant?

If there is any possibility that you are or may be pregnant please telephone the X-ray department.

Is there any special preparation?

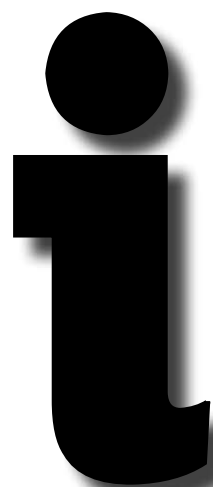
Yes, this is very important. So that we can see the small bowel clearly it must be empty. You will find instructions on how you should prepare for the investigation on the last page of this leaflet. You should take the special laxative provided on the day before the examination. The laxative is very vigorous and to avoid inconvenience it is best to stay at home on this day.

What do I do when I arrive in the department?

Please report to the reception desk 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

Clinical Radiology

☎ 01722 336262 ext 4196



If you need your information in another language or medium (audio, large print, etc) please contact Customer Care on 0800 374 208 or send an email to: customer care@salisbury.nhs.uk

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.

Please complete The Friends & Family Test to tell us about your experience at: www.salisbury.nhs.uk/FriendsFamily or download our App from the Apple App store or Google Play Store.

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.

Author: Lesley Smith
Role: Lead Interventional Radiographer
Date written: April 2011
Last revised: Nov 2018
Review date: Nov 2021
Version: 1.2
Code: PI0775

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 of another patient may cause a delay.

Who will I see?

In the X-ray room will be a radiologist (an X-ray doctor) and radiographer.

What happens during the small bowel meal examination?

You will be given a small dose of Metaclopramide (which is a medication that will slightly reduce the time that it takes for the barium to pass through the small bowel). You will then be given three cups of a chalky white barium liquid to drink after which X-ray images will be taken at regular intervals. The rate of movement of foodstuffs through the small bowel varies between individuals, and can take as little as 30 minutes though the average is 1 – 2 hours.

The X-ray images will be taken while you are lying on an X-ray couch. The first one with you lying on your back, the rest with you lying on your tummy. Between the first and second image you will be asked to lie on your right side to allow gravity to assist the passage of barium through the stomach. Every time an image is taken you will be asked to hold your breath.

Towards the end of the examination the Radiologist will need to look more closely at the last part of your small bowel on a screen while you are still on the X-ray couch. They may need to press on your tummy during this time to spread the bowel loops apart and to make sure that the last part of the small bowel is seen.

What will happen after the examination?

Barium does not get absorbed by the body and so your stools will appear white for a few days. Sometimes the 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 your 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 for you. If you are diabetic please talk to your diabetic nurse for advice before beginning this preparation plan.

Clinical Radiology

 01722 336262 ext 4196

The day before your small bowel meal examination

Fluids only today – no solid food.

At 8 o'clock in the morning

Mix one sachet of Picolax with 3 or 4 dessert spoonfuls of cold water in a glass. The solution may become hot - this is normal. Wait 5 minutes, then dilute the solution with cold water to make a glass full, stir and drink. Remember that Picolax will cause frequent loose bowel movements at any time after taking a dose. Stay within easy reach of a toilet. Using Vaseline, or a barrier cream on your bottom will help to prevent your bottom from getting sore.

During the day you may have clear soups, meat extract drinks such as Bovril or Oxo, tea or coffee without milk but sweetened if desired. You may drink as much water as you want.

It is important that no milk is taken and you must not have anything to eat.

At 4 o'clock in the afternoon

Take the second sachet of Picolax. Mix and drink as for the above instructions.

Continue to drink plenty of clear fluids (drinks without milk). You can have the occasional barley sugar/boiled sweet. You may be very hungry by now, but it is very important that you do not eat anything today.

The day of your small bowel meal examination

Please do not have anything to eat. You can continue to drink clear fluids only.