NHS
Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Having a barium video swallow (adult)

This leaflet explains what happens during a barium video swallow examination in the Radiology (X-ray) Department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. The examination is conducted by a radiographer (X-ray professional) and a speech and language therapist.

What is a barium video swallow?

This is an investigation to test your swallowing function. You may be experiencing difficulties in swallowing certain foods or liquids or speech. This test is designed to look at how the muscles work while you eat or drink.

Why do I need this test?

The speech and language therapists should have seen you prior to the appointment being made and will have explained the need for this type of test being done. If this is not the case, please contact us by telephoning 0118 322 5205 (answerphone).

How long will it take?

The investigation takes about 45 minutes, although we may ask you to stay longer if additional X-rays are required.

Do I need to prepare for it?

You must have nothing to eat or drink for 2 hours before your appointment.

Please bring your appointment letter with you. If you have been asked to bring certain foodstuffs or drinks, please remember these. There is usually no need for you to change for this examination, but please try to avoid wearing neck jewellery, facial piercings or upper clothing with metalwork (i.e. zips, press-studs).

If you weigh over 20 stone / 127kg, please contact us beforehand by telephoning 0118 322 7991.

What does it involve?

During the examination, we may ask you to swallow different liquids and solids mixed with barium (a special fluid that shows up on X-rays). The specialist radiographer will watch the barium on a TV monitor and take X-ray pictures and the speech and language therapist may ask you to try different techniques, such as putting your chin on your chest, to help you swallow. It is not a painful procedure.

After the barium video swallow

You will be able to eat and drink as normal. Barium can cause constipation, so please drink plenty of fluids and eat more fibre for a few days after the test to avoid this.
You can drive home after the examination, as barium does not affect your abilities.

Results

A report of your examination will be sent to your referring doctor; if this is a hospital specialist, then the specialist will contact your GP with the report.

Are there any risks?

This test involves X-rays. The amount of radiation is kept to a minimum and is equivalent to the amount of background radiation you naturally receive over 3-5 weeks.
Barium can cause constipation and you are advised to drink plenty of fluids after the test to wash the barium out of your system.
Barium is not absorbed by the body and so it is very rare for an allergic reaction to occur with a barium test.
This test should not be performed if there is any chance you might be pregnant as radiation is potentially harmful to the baby.

Further information

Radiology Department Tel 0118 322 7991

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RAD_0040
RBFT Radiology Department, November 2026
Next review due: November 2028