NHS
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Having a barium meal and follow through

This leaflet explains what happens during a barium meal and follow through examination in the Radiology (X-ray) Department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. The examination is conducted by a radiologist (specialist X-ray doctor) or a specialist radiographer (X-ray professional).

What is a barium meal and follow through?

A barium meal and follow through is a test designed to look at your small bowel.

Why do I need this test?

Your referring doctor should have explained why you need this test to you. If you do not know why you need the test, please contact your GP or referring doctor before your appointment date.

How long will it take?

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

Preparation

You must have only clear fluids for 24 hours prior to this test (i.e. clear soups, Oxo, Bovril, black tea/coffee, Lucozade, fizzy soft drinks, fruit squash, fruit juices (without bits),or water). This is so that your bowels are completely clear from solids. **Do not drink milk or milk-based products.**

Please bring your appointment letter and a dressing gown with you (or a gown will be provided).

If you weigh over 31 stone / 197kg, please contact us beforehand by telephoning 0118 322 7991.

What does it involve?

We may ask you to change into a gown before the test. During the examination, we will ask you to swallow some barium liquid. It is this liquid that shows up using X-rays. The radiologist or specialist radiographer will be taking X-ray images throughout. We may ask you to wait in the waiting room during your test, so please bring something with you to occupy yourself.

The examination is not a painful procedure.

After the examination

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

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

Are there any risks with this test?

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. Your stools (poo) may look slightly whitish but this is the barium passing through.

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

https://patient.info/digestive-health/acid-reflux-and-oesophagitis/barium-tests-swallow-meal-follow-through

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_0037
RBFT Radiology Department, November 2026
Next review due: November 2028