



Having a barium proctogram

This leaflet explains what happens during a barium proctogram 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 proctogram?

It is a specialised X-ray examination, which produces a series of images that enables us to see the way your lower abdominal structures (the organs that sit in the area below the belly button) move when you attempt to empty your bowels (have a poo).

Barium is a thick, white liquid that is used because it shows up well on x-rays.

Why do I need this test?

Your doctor has referred you for this imaging test to help find out the cause of your symptoms (e.g. incontinence, constipation or difficulty emptying your bowels). The test will help to assess the pelvic structures to try to establish a cause as to why you may have trouble emptying your bowels, so you can have the appropriate treatment for it.

How long will it take?

You need to arrive one hour before your appointment time, to drink some liquid barium, which allows us to see your small bowel during the test. The examination itself takes about 10 minutes.

What does it involve?

You will change into a hospital gown and be taken into the X-ray room where you will lie on a table and the doctor (radiologist) or specialist radiographer will gently insert some barium paste into your back passage (rectum). We will then ask you to sit on a commode and attempt to empty the barium paste while the radiologist or specialist radiographer takes X-rays.

We appreciate that this procedure requires privacy, so we will make every effort to make you feel relaxed and comfortable. The radiographer may be male or female but will have a same gender chaperone present.

Do I need to prepare for it?

There is no preparation required before you attend for the test. However, if you weigh over 18 stone / 115kg, please contact us beforehand by telephoning 0118 322 7991.

Will it hurt?

No, it should not hurt.

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 that you might be pregnant as radiation is potentially harmful to the baby. Females of childbearing age should have their appointment within 10 days of the first day of their last period, to avoid being X-rayed in early pregnancy.

There is a very small risk (1 in 2000) of a tear to the lining of the rectum (back passage). This usually only occurs if the patient also has severe bowel inflammation.

Are there any alternative procedures?

There is no alternative procedure available in this Trust.

How will I get the results?

Your referring doctor will receive a copy of the x-ray report. Your referring doctor will either arrange a letter to inform you of your results or a follow up appointment in the outpatient clinic.

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.

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

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

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