Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Speech & Language Therapy-led videofluoroscopy (VFS): what to expect

Adult SLT direct tel: 0118 322 5205

Paediatric SLT tel: 0300 365 4000

What is a videofluoroscopy?

A videofluoroscopy is a moving x-ray of a person's swallow. It looks at what happens to different textures of food and/or drink as it passes through the mouth, the throat (known as the pharynx) and into the top part of your gullet (known as the oesophagus).

Why do I need a videofluoroscopy?

You will have seen a speech and language therapist (SLT) already who will have assessed your swallow. They have recommended a videofluoroscopy to understand the swallow in more detail.

A videofluoroscopy is performed by a specialist SLT and either a radiologist (doctor specialising in x-ray) or a specialist radiographer.

A videofluoroscopy is not the same as a barium swallow. A barium swallow looks at your oesophagus/stomach in detail.

How long will it take?

The whole appointment usually lasts between 30-45 minutes.

Do I need to prepare for it?

No. Please eat and drink as normal, including any gastrostomy tube feeds. Do not stop any medications you usually take.

Where do I go for the videofluoroscopy?

Videofluoroscopy only happens at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. It is in the Radiology (X-ray) Department on level 1 (Centre Block) of the main hospital.

When you arrive, you will need to tell the receptionist, who will then direct you to wait on the seats in the corridor.



What happens during a videofluoroscopy?



You will need to sit upright in a chair or your usual wheelchair for the procedure. It is important you sit as still as possible. If you require specialist seating to be able to sit upright, this will be discussed before the appointment in case we have equipment that can be used.

If you are a child/young person, your parent/carer can stand right next to you during the x-ray. They will wear a radiology 'coat' while the x-ray takes place.

If you are an adult, a similar request can be accommodated in certain circumstances. Please contact us in advance of the appointment to discuss this.

You will be given food and/or drink that is mixed with barium (a dense powder that shows up on the x-rays). The barium means we can see the food/drink as it travels through your mouth and throat and is essential for the procedure. It is a white, chalky consistency with a sweet taste. Sometimes, we may use an iodine-based drink that has a bitter taste.

During the procedure there will be x-rays taken by the specialist radiographer. It is not a painful procedure – it does not involve any needles.

After the videofluoroscopy

You will be able to continue your usual way of eating and drinking (either by mouth or by tube feed). Barium can cause constipation, so please drink plenty of fluids and eat more fibre (fruit/vegetables) for a few days after the test to avoid this. You can drive home after the examination, as barium does not affect your ability to drive.

Results

A report of your examination will be sent to the professional who referred you for the procedure, your SLT and your GP. The SLT will go through the report with you.

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 constipate you and we advise you to drink plenty of fluids after the test to wash the barium out of your system. Your stools (poo) may appear 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.

If you are to have the iodine-based contrast, it is important we know if you have an iodine allergy.

If we see food and/or drink being aspirated ("going the wrong way") we will ask you to cough to help clear it.

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.

Further information

www.patient.co.uk/health/Barium-Swallow-/-Meal-/-Follow-Through.htm

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.

RBFT Speech & Language Therapy, Nov 2026. Next review due: Nov 2028.