

# Having a barium swallow / meal

## Introduction

The examination is conducted by either a radiologist (specialist X-ray doctor) or a specialist radiographer (X-ray professional).

A relative or friend can accompany you, although for safety reasons they may have to wait in the waiting area during the procedure. No childcare facilities are available.

## What is a barium swallow / meal?

A barium swallow / meal is a test designed to look at your oesophagus (the tube leading from your mouth to your stomach).

## Why do I need this test?

Your referring doctor should have explained why you need this test to you. It may be because you have problems swallowing or suffer from heartburn / indigestion.

## How long will it take?

The investigation takes about 10 to 20 minutes, although you may be asked to stay longer if additional x-rays are required.

## Preparation

You must have nothing to eat for 4 hours before your appointment, but you may continue to drink fluids until 2 hours before your appointment. Please bring with you: your appointment letter, and a dressing gown if you wish.

## What does it involve?

You may be asked to change into a gown before the test. During the examination, you will be asked to swallow some barium liquid, it is this liquid that shows up on the X-ray monitor. You may also be asked to swallow some fizzy granules with a small quantity of bitter liquid. This causes a harmless gas to be made in the stomach. The radiologist or specialist radiographer will be taking X-ray images throughout. It is not a painful procedure.

### After the barium swallow / meal

You will be able to eat and drink as normal. Barium is not absorbed by the body and **but** can cause constipation so please drink plenty of fluids and eat more fibre for a few days after the test to avoid this.

### 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 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 you are advised to drink plenty of fluids after the test to wash out the barium from your system. It may turn your stools slightly white 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.

If you weigh over 31stone or 197kg please contact us.

### Further information

[www.patient.co.uk/health/Barium-Swallow-/-Meal-/-Follow-Through.htm](http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Barium-Swallow-/-Meal-/-Follow-Through.htm)

More information is available on the Trust website visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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