

# Having a Barium meal / swallow

## Patient information leaflet

**If you need this leaflet in a different language or accessible format  
please speak to a member of staff who can arrange it for you.**

اگر به این بروشور به زبان دیگر یا در قالب دسترس پذیر نیاز دارید،  
لطفاً با یکی از کارکنان صحبت کنید تا آن را برای شما تهیه کند.

Jeśli niniejsza ulotka ma być dostępna w innym języku lub formacie,  
proszę skontaktować się z członkiem personelu, który ją dla Państwa przygotowuje.

Dacă aveți nevoie de această broșură într-o altă limbă sau într-un format accesibil,  
vă rog să discutați cu un membru al personalului să se ocupe  
de acest lucru pentru dumneavoastră

如果您需要本传单的其他语言版本或无障碍格式，请联系工作人员为您安排。

إذا احتجت إلى هذه النشرة بلغة أخرى، أو بتنسيق  
يسهل الوصول إليه، يرجى التحدث إلى أحد الموظفين لترتيب ذلك لك.

# Introduction

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having a barium swallow. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

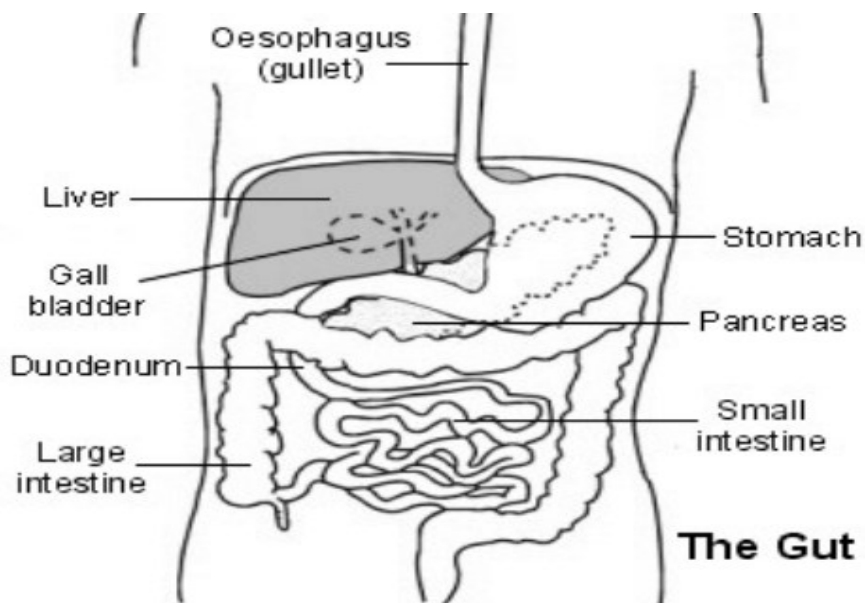
## What is a Barium Swallow?

A Barium Swallow is an examination of the oesophagus (food pipe) and the stomach. These areas of your body cannot normally be seen on x-ray images unless coated in a white liquid called barium contrast.

The procedure is done by both:

- An Advanced Practitioner Radiographer (highly trained radiographer)/ Radiologist (a doctor who uses x-rays to diagnose and treat illnesses).
- A radiographer and an assistant practitioner (both health professionals that produce images used to diagnose and treat illnesses).

The procedure uses fluoroscopic imaging, a type of x-ray, to view images in real time. The images are taken as you swallow the liquid and as it passes into your stomach. The radiographer is able to check the oesophagus and stomach and see how well the liquid moves through them.



# What to expect on your visit

## What happens during a barium meal?

You will be asked to change into a hospital gown. You may also be asked to remove jewellery, dentures, glasses and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the x-ray images. Please tell the radiographer of any medicines you are taking, severe allergies, recent illnesses or other medical conditions. You will be given some fizzy granules, called carbex, to swallow with a small amount of lemon juice liquid - this creates gas and helps us see your stomach better. You will then be asked to drink a white liquid called barium. The radiographer will then take a series of x-rays to see the contrast in your oesophagus and stomach.

You may be repositioned from a standing to laying position in order to get pictures from several angles. The x-ray equipment may also move in order to get the best possible pictures. The radiographers will be there at all times to help you. The examination takes about 15 minutes, but please allow up to one hour for everything to be completed.

## How should I prepare for the procedure?

It is important that your stomach is empty for this examination. If your appointment is in the morning please be nil by mouth from midnight. If your appointment is in the afternoon please nil by mouth from 7 am. If you need to, you can take small sips of water or clear fluid, but avoid drinking large amounts of fluid as this will dilute the contrast and make your examination less effective. You should continue to take your prescribed medicines, which you can take with a small amount of water or clear fluid. Please arrive on time for your appointment to help us give a prompt service to everyone.

## If you have diabetes

If you take tablets to control your diabetes, you should have a morning appointment. If you take insulin, your appointment should be at 9am. Please contact the x-ray department if this has not been done.

## If you take tablets for your diabetes

Miss your morning dose on the day of the examination. Bring your tablets and some food with you to take after the examination.

## If you are on insulin

Miss the morning dose of insulin on the day of your examination. You may need to reduce the previous evening's dose. Please bring your insulin and some food with you to take after the examination. If you take a long-acting insulin, do not stop taking it – speak to your diabetes team for advice. Check your blood sugar regularly. If your blood sugar is below 4, then drink a small cup of sugary fluid, such as Lucozade, or have some boiled sweets

## Additional Information

### Why should I have a Barium Swallow?

Your doctor has referred you for this examination to help make a diagnosis or help with your treatment plans. It may be a follow-up examination or you may be having symptoms

### Will I feel any pain?

This examination should be painless. If you are concerned please speak to the radiographers.

### What happens after the barium swallow?

Some people are mildly uncomfortable and bloated after barium studies. However, most people should have little, if any, effects. Once you are happy to leave, you are free to do so.

### What do I need to do after I go home?

You should restart your usual diet. The barium contrast may cause some constipation. To prevent this please drink plenty of fluids. The barium can often make your stools pale for a few days – this is normal.

### What should I do if I have a problem?

If you feel unwell following the examination or have any concerns please contact your GP or the x-ray department.

### Risks

X-rays are of a type of radiation known as ionising radiation. The dose that you get from a medical x-ray is very low and the associated risks are minimal. The radiographer is responsible for making sure that your dose is kept as low as possible and that the benefits of having the examination outweigh any risk.

There are no risks associated with the barium liquid as it is not absorbed by the body. It only coats the walls of the oesophagus, stomach and bowel. For a small number of patients, there is a risk of aspiration (breathing in) of the contrast. This is unlikely but the risk increases for patients with known difficulties swallowing or a previous aspiration. In these cases a safer alternative contrast is used which is water soluble.

### Pregnancy

If you are, or think you could be pregnant, please contact us prior to your appointment on the phone number in your appointment letter.

### Are there any alternatives?

There may be other alternative imaging available. However, this has been considered to be the most appropriate test for you. If you have any questions please speak to the doctor that referred you or with the radiologist on the day of your examination.

## Finally

The pictures taken during the examination are studied carefully and a detailed report is produced. The results will be sent to the person who referred you for the test. They will discuss the results with you and any treatment you may need.

You may already have an appointment with the team who referred you. If not, please contact them to arrange one to discuss the results of this test.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call the Radiology Department via the number given on your appointment letter.

As this is a teaching hospital there may be students and observers present during your examination as part of their ongoing training. Please let the staff know if you do not wish any students to be present during your attendance.

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