



Information for
patients and
carers

Barium Swallow/Meal

What is a barium swallow / meal?

A barium swallow/meal is an X-ray examination of your oesophagus (gullet) and stomach.

As part of the examination barium (an X-ray dye) is used. X-rays are taken as you swallow the barium liquid to see how it passes through your oesophagus and your stomach.

A very small number of patients may have an allergic reaction to the barium.

Before your examination the Radiographer will ask you a series of questions about your medical history, including any allergies you may have.

This will help us assess if you are at risk of an allergic reaction. The barium swallow/meal may be carried out for a variety of reasons, including difficulty swallowing (dysphagia), and allows us to assess the function of your oesophagus.

Your barium swallow/meal will be performed by a specially trained Advanced Practitioner Radiographer or a Consultant Radiologist. An assistant may also be in the examination room to assist during your examination.

Please inform us before you attend:

- If you are or think you may be pregnant
- If you are breast/chest feeding
- If you weigh over 28 stone (178kg)
- If you feel you may need further assistance with transferring (including the use of a hoist)
- If you require an interpreter – please inform us as soon as you receive your appointment letter and we will arrange an official interpreter for you

Are there any special preparations required before the examination?

For this examination your stomach must be empty. Please do not eat or drink for 4 hours before your barium swallow/meal. Please continue to take any necessary medications before your examination. This will not interfere with the test.

Can I bring a relative or friend with me?

Anyone can accompany you to the hospital but they will usually not be allowed into the room when you have your examination.

Please note that we do not have child care facilities; if you need to bring your children with you please bring along an adult who can supervise them while your examination is being done.

What happens when I arrive at the X-ray department?

When you arrive at the X-ray department, please book in at the reception desk where you will be asked to have a seat in the waiting area.

Before starting the examination, the Radiographer will ask you to put on a hospital gown in the changing area.

When you are ready, they will take you through to the examination room.

Once in the room the Radiographer will check some details with you and complete a checklist to ensure it is safe for you to have the barium.

The Radiographer will explain the examination and answer any questions you may have.



What happens during the examination?

During the examination you will be asked to drink mouthfuls of the barium, which is a white, chalky liquid that shows up on the X-ray monitor.

As you are swallowing the barium the Radiographer will take X-rays to demonstrate the barium passing down your oesophagus (gullet) into your stomach.



This will be done with you standing or sitting in different positions so the Radiographer can clearly see your oesophagus.

We may also ask you to chew and swallow a small piece of digestive biscuit which will be coated in the barium liquid.

This is to demonstrate how solid food moves through your oesophagus.

Sometimes we may ask you to swallow some fizzy granules (called Carbox), followed by a citrus flavoured solution which produces gas in your stomach and demonstrates the stomach lining.

This ensures the Radiographer is able to obtain clear X-rays of your stomach during your examination.

It is often necessary for us to lay you down during the examination to take some further X-rays of your stomach.

The X-ray bed will be moved from a standing to a flat position and you will be asked to lie in a variety of positions so that all of your stomach lining is shown.

The Radiographer will be with you at all times to assist you. When these X-rays have been taken the Radiographer will move the X-ray bed back into the standing position and a final X-ray will be taken.

What happens after the examination?

Once the Radiographer has taken the necessary X-rays for your examination you will be able to get dressed and you may leave the hospital.

After the examination you may eat and drink as normal.

Are there any side effects?

The barium liquid can sometimes cause slight constipation. To minimise this we advise you to drink plenty of clear fluids for a few days after your examination.

Please be aware the barium can often make your stools pale or white after the examination.

Very rarely the barium can also make you feel sick and cause diarrhoea.

The Radiographer will offer further guidance on these side effects before your examination.

Are there any risks?

There are some small risks involved with X-rays but only the minimum amount of radiation is used to produce the images required.

We use the smallest dose possible, in line with national regulations. This allows us to make an accurate diagnosis to help plan your care, therefore the benefits of having the X-ray far outweigh the radiation dose you will receive.

When will I receive the examination results?

The results will be sent to the Clinician who referred you for this examination. During your examination the Radiographer will advise you on how you will receive these results. Unfortunately, you will not receive any results on the day of your examination.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact Royal Preston Hospital X-ray Department on **01772 522096**.

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

All our patient information leaflets are available on our website for patients to access and download:

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact the Quit Squad Freephone 0800 328 6297.

Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

Gujarati:

આ માહિતીને સમજવામાં સહાયતા જોઈતી હોય તો કૃપાકરીને પૂછો. આ માહિતી મોટા છપાણામાં અને અન્ય ભાષામાં ઉપલબ્ધ કરી શકાય છે.

Romanian:

Vă rugăm să întrebați dacă aveți nevoie de ajutor pentru înțelegerea acestor informații. Aceste informații pot fi puse la dispoziție în format mare și în alte limbi.”

Polish:

Poinformuj nas, jeśli potrzebna jest ci pomoc w zrozumieniu tych informacji. Informacje te można również udostępnić dużym drukiem oraz w innych językach

Punjabi:

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਸਮਝਣ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਦਦ ਲੈਣੀ ਚਾਹੋਗੇ ਤਾਂ ਕਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਪੁੱਛੋ। ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਵੱਡੇ ਪ੍ਰਿੰਟ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮੁਹੱਈਆ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ।

Urdu:

دو سر ی زبانوں او ر بڑ ی اگر آپ کو ہی معلومات سمجھنے کے یئل مدد ی ضرورت ہے تو ییچھپیا یں یبھابی دست ہو یسکت ہے برا ے مہر یبان پو ییچھدی۔ معلومات

Arabic:

مطبوعه بأ ح ر ف ك ب ي ر ة و بلغات إذا كنت تر يد مساعده في فهم هذه لمعلومات يُر جى أن تطلب أخرى يمكن تو فير هذه المعلومات

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Division: Diagnostics and Clinical Support
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