

Information for Patients and Carers

Barium Follow Through

What is a barium follow through?

A barium follow through is an X-ray examination of your small bowel. It involves a series of X-rays of your abdomen which are taken at timed intervals during your appointment.

As part of this examination you will be asked to drink a white liquid called barium. The barium is an X-ray dye which coats your small bowel and allows us to see it on the X-rays.

A very small number of patients 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.

Your barium follow through will be performed by a specially trained advanced practitioner radiographer or a radiologist. An assistant will also be in the examination room to help you 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 (178 kg)
- 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 and small bowel must be empty. We ask that you do not eat or drink for 6 hours before your barium follow through.

Please continue to take any necessary medications with a sip of water 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 childcare 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?

At the start of the examination the radiographer will ask you to drink two cups of the barium liquid. This is a white, fruit flavoured, chalky liquid. A fizzy powder (Carbex) will also be given to you to swallow.

This produces gas in your stomach and will allow the radiographer to clearly see the lining of your stomach and small bowel.

At timed intervals the radiographer will ask you to lie on the X-ray table and they will take X-rays to see how the barium is progressing through your small bowel. You may be asked to turn into different positions, onto your left and right-hand side, this allows the radiographer to view your small bowel from different angles.



As the barium takes time to move through your bowel you may be asked to take a seat and wait until the next X-ray is required. It is difficult to give an exact length of time for this examination as it depends how quickly the barium moves through your small bowel.

Please expect to be in the X-ray department for at least 2 - 3 hours. You should experience no pain during your barium follow through examination.

What happens after the examination?

Once the radiographer has taken the necessary X-rays for your examination you will be able to get dressed again 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 examination far outweigh the radiation dose you will receive.

If you have any queries about your examination, or you have any other questions, worries or concerns please do not hesitate to contact us prior to your appointment.

When will I receive the examination results?

The X-rays will be reported on by a radiologist after your examination. 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.

You will not receive any results on the day of your examination.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact us on the below telephone numbers:

- If your appointment is at Royal Preston Hospital, please call **01772 522096**.
- If your appointment is at Chorley and South Ribble Hospital, please call **01257 245196**.

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware

<https://bepartofresearch.nihr.ac.uk/>

Follow us on social media @lancshospitals

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

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

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

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals is a smoke-free site. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on any of our premises, either inside or outside the buildings. Our staff will ask you about your smoking status when you come to hospital and will offer you support and advice about stopping smoking this will include Nicotine Replacement Therapy to help manage your symptoms of withdrawal and the opportunity to speak to a nurse or advisor from the specialist Tobacco and Alcohol Care Team.

If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact Smokefree Lancashire on Freephone **08081962638**.

Please ask a member of staff if you would like help in understanding this information.

This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.

Our patient information group review our leaflets regularly, if you feel you would like to feedback on this information or join our reading group please contact on email address:

patientexperienceandinvolem@LTHTR.nhs.uk

Department: Radiology/Fluoroscopy

Division: Diagnostics and Clinical Support

Production date: August 2025

Review date: August 2028

JR 1335 v1