

**We recommend that you bring some food (such as a sandwich or some biscuits), and a drink to have after your examination.**

### Are there any after-effects?

You may continue to feel slightly bloated for a short while until the air in your stomach works its way out. You will be able to eat and drink as normal straight away. For the first day or so, you should drink plenty of fluids to help the barium pass out of your system. You may feel slightly constipated for a few days afterwards; you can ease this by taking a mild laxative.

Your stools will look white and remain discoloured for the next day or so. Barium stools are sometimes difficult to flush from the toilet pan and may need repeat flushing.

Otherwise, you should be able to return to your normal lifestyle and work straight away.

### Are there any risks?

All X-ray procedures involve exposure to radiation in varying amounts, which may add very slightly to the risk of developing cancer. The length and level of exposure to radiation from X-rays in medical procedures is strictly controlled and kept to the minimum possible. For a barium swallow, you will be exposed to radiation for several minutes. This equals about the same amount of background radiation that you will receive naturally from the environment over 12 to 18 months. There is a far greater risk from missing a serious disorder by not having this investigation.

### When will I get my results?

You will not be told the results of your examination whilst you are in the department. We will review your X-ray films and then send your results to the doctor who requested the examination as soon as possible. This may take some time to reach your referring doctor, but is normally available in less than 14 days. You could ask the radiographer or radiologist for some indication of timing.

You should receive an appointment to see the doctor again, if you do not already have one booked.

### Further information

If you have any questions about your examination, or need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at the Radiography department on: 01872 252338.

If you need to change your appointment, contact the X-ray appointment clerk for your hospital:

Royal Cornwall Hospital, Truro  
01872 252290

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01872 252793



## Barium swallow



## **What is a barium swallow?**

Your doctor has asked us to perform a barium examination of your oesophagus (gullet) to help find the cause of your symptoms. This is called a barium swallow, which is a test using X-rays and barium liquid to get X-ray pictures of your oesophagus. Barium is a chalky white fluid that coats the lining of the oesophagus to make it show up on the X-ray pictures.

## **What is it for?**

Your doctor may suggest this examination if you are having difficulty swallowing, or having unexplained pain or vomiting, or if you have chest pain or reflux (backflow of stomach juices into the lower part of the oesophagus).

It provides useful information about the condition of your gullet and stomach, and helps your doctor to diagnose inflammation, ulcers, or tumours.

## **Are there any alternatives?**

The alternative to a barium swallow is an upper gastrointestinal (GI) endoscopy (OGD). This uses a flexible telescope to look into the oesophagus. A barium swallow has the advantage of being able to assess motility (the ability to move spontaneously). It can also safely investigate any upper GI disease or condition such as a pouch, which could be perforated during endoscopy.

## **What will happen if I don't have the examination?**

Your doctor will be unable to diagnose and treat the cause of your symptoms.

## **How do I prepare for my barium swallow?**

It is very important that your stomach is empty for this examination. Food particles can make it difficult to read the X-rays. You must not eat or drink anything for six hours before your appointment time.

Do **not** stop taking vital drugs such as steroids, diabetic drugs or heart drugs. Diabetic patients with any queries should contact the Diabetic Centre directly on: 01872 254560 between 9.00am and 10.00am Monday to Friday.

## **Who will I see?**

A small team will usually care for you during this examination, which may include a radiologist, a radiographer and perhaps a nurse. Whoever is doing the examination will watch a television screen at the time, and take X-ray images. Later, the radiologist will review the X-ray images and issue a report.

## **What will happen?**

When you arrive for your examination, you will need to change into a gown. For your own comfort, you may prefer to bring your own dressing gown and slippers.

You will be taken into the X-ray room and asked to take off the dressing gown but keep on the hospital gown. You will be asked to drink a beaker of barium, a chalky white liquid which is mildly fruit flavoured, one or two mouthfuls at a time. This coats the lining of the gullet and stomach, so that they show up on the TV monitor and on the X-ray films. You will be positioned in front of the X-ray camera.

You may then be asked to swallow a dessert-spoon of granules followed by a dessertspoon of liquid. This temporarily enlarges your oesophagus and stomach and will make you feel as though you have had a fizzy drink. Please try not to burp, so that the gas remains in your gullet and stomach until after the X-rays have been taken. This allows greater detail to show up on the X-rays.

The radiologist will watch the monitor and take X-ray pictures. Once your gullet has been studied, the machine will slowly tilt, so that you are lying horizontally, and more pictures are taken of your stomach.

You will be asked to move into different positions and to hold your breath while the pictures are taken. You may also be asked to swallow lying down.

If you think you will have trouble moving about on the X-ray table, please tell us as soon as possible so we can make suitable arrangements to help you.

## **Will it be uncomfortable?**

You might feel a very slight discomfort from your stomach being full of air.

## **How long will it take?**

The examination should take about 10 to 15 minutes.

## **Following your examination?**

When your examination is finished, we will advise you that you can dress and leave the department.