



**The Leeds
Teaching Hospitals**
NHS Trust

Having a barium meal/swallow

Information for patients



Leeds
Radiology

What is a barium meal / swallow?

A **barium swallow** is an x-ray examination to show the oesophagus (food pipe).

A **barium meal** is an x-ray examination to show the stomach and the first part of the small intestine (duodenum).

What does it involve?

You will be asked to drink some x-ray dye which shows up on x-ray. X-rays will be taken from different angles whilst you stand against then lie on the x-ray table.

You may also be asked to swallow some granules and a lemon flavoured liquid. This will fizz up to produce gas in your stomach.

For a barium meal, a small injection (Buscopan) may be given into your arm to relax the muscles in your stomach.

Who performs the examination?

It is performed by a team of healthcare professionals which may include a radiographer, an advanced practitioner, an assistant and a radiologist.

How do I prepare for the examination?

HAVE NOTHING TO EAT OR DRINK for SIX HOURS before the examination.

Important note for patients with diabetes:

If you have an early morning appointment bring your morning medication and a snack with you.

If you have an afternoon appointment eat breakfast and take your morning medication at least 6 hours before your appointment and bring a snack and any afternoon medications with you.

Please telephone the department if you have any questions.

In the Radiology Department

You will be given a gown to change into. Please do not bring large sums of money or items of value with you.

How long will I be in the department?

Allow up to an hour for your visit. Although we try to keep to your appointment time, there may be a delay due to emergency patients.

We are unable to provide any childcare so please make alternative arrangements.

Are there any risks?

Radiation

This examination involves x-rays. Patients who are, or might be pregnant **must** inform a member of staff.

The amount of radiation used is more than an ordinary x-ray of the chest or body. It is equal to the natural radiation we receive from the atmosphere over a period of approximately two years.

The risk from this radiation dose is very low.

Allergic reaction

Some patients may be allergic to the x-ray dye or medicines. This is very rare. If you have any allergies, please tell a member of staff.

Aspiration

Sometimes when we swallow some of what we swallow goes into our lungs. If a lot of the x-ray dye does go into your lungs we will make sure you cough most of it up before you leave. The risk of becoming unwell because of this is very small.

Despite these small risks your doctor believes it is beneficial for you to have this examination.

Do you ever fail to complete the examination?

This examination is usually successful. If, for any reason, we are unable to perform the examination we will inform your doctor who will discuss the alternatives with you.

Following the examination

You will be able to eat, drink and continue normal activities.

Are there any side effects?

The barium can have a constipating effect so drink plenty of fluids over the following few days to keep hydrated.

If you had the injection (Buscopan) it can make your mouth dry and your vision slightly blurred, which normally lasts 15-20 minutes. Very rarely patients may develop pain or redness of the eyes which occurs in the 24 hours after the test. If this happens, you should go to an A+E department immediately for a check-up and take this leaflet with you.

How will I get my results?

You will not be given your results on the day. If you were sent by a hospital consultant, they will contact you. If your GP sent you for the examination, please contact them to get your results.

**What did you think of your care? Visit bit.ly/nhsleedsfft
*Your views matter***

© The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust • 3rd edition (Ver 1)

Developed by: Gill Roe, Leeds Radiology Services

Produced by: Medical Illustration Services • MID code: 20231109_015/BP

LN000046
Publication date
02/2024
Review date
02/2027