



**The Leeds  
Teaching Hospitals**  
NHS Trust

# Having a small bowel meal

Information for patients



**Leeds**  
Radiology

## **What is a small bowel meal?**

This is an x-ray examination of the small bowel. It is necessary for you to follow the instructions in this leaflet very carefully as the bowel needs to be clear for us to obtain good results.

At the start of the examination you will be given two cups of x-ray dye to drink (barium). We will then wait for this to pass all the way through your small bowel. We cannot predict how long this will take so you need to allow four hours for your appointment. You will have x-rays taken of your abdomen during this time so we can follow the progress of the barium.

## **Who performs the test?**

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

## **How do I prepare for the test?**

Do not stop taking vital medicines (heart drugs, steroids, diuretics / water tablets etc.).

In order to visualise the small bowel it is important that it is completely clean and empty. This is achieved by a special diet (see page 4).

Please follow the preparation instructions carefully as failure to do so may result in the test not working and you having to be re-booked for another day.

***Important note for patients with diabetes:***

You should have an early morning appointment and bring your morning medication with you. Please telephone the department if you have not been given an early morning appointment or if you have not received a separate information sheet.

## The day before the examination

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>1</b><br><b>Breakfast<br/>Lunch<br/>and Tea</b> | <b><i>Meals should be limited to small portions of any combination of any of the following:</i></b>   |  |
|  | White bread or toast, honey, seedless jam, boiled or poached egg, pasta (not wholemeal), boiled white rice,   | Chicken or fish (grilled, poached or steamed), tofu, clear soup, jelly |
| <b>2</b><br><b>Between meals and after tea</b>     | <b><i>Drink as much clear liquid as possible:</i></b><br>Tea or coffee (without milk), water, squash, Bovril, Oxo, fizzy drinks (not diet/low calorie). |  |
| <b>3</b><br><b>From midnight</b>                   | <b>Nothing further to eat or drink after midnight.</b>  |  |

## The day of the examination

Have nothing to eat or drink until after the examination. If you have an afternoon appointment you may have a drink and one slice of toast before 9.00am on the day of the examination, but nothing else to eat and no further drinks until after the examination.

### What should I bring with me?

You will be required to change into a gown for this examination. We will provide you with a gown, but you may wish to bring your own dressing gown. Please do not bring large sums of money or items of value with you. Unfortunately we are unable to provide any child care so please make alternative arrangements if necessary.

## Are there any side-effects?

### Radiation

This procedure involves x-rays. Female patients who are, or might be pregnant **must** inform a member of staff in advance.

The amount of radiation used is more than an ordinary x-ray of the chest or body and 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 we give you. This is very rare. If you have any allergies please tell the member of staff who is performing your examination, at the start of the examination.

## Do you ever fail to complete the examination?

This is a safe examination that 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.

Despite these small risks your doctor believes it is beneficial for you to have this examination. Do bear in mind that there are greater risks from missing a serious disorder by not having the examination.

## How long will I be in the department?

Allow four hours for your examination. Although we try to keep to your appointment time, occasionally there may be a delay due to emergency patients.

## **How will I feel following the test?**

You will be able to eat and drink and resume normal activities immediately. Drink plenty of fluid for the next day or so as you may be a bit dehydrated. The x-ray dye you will have (barium) can cause constipation. Drinking plenty of fluids after the test will help prevent this.

## **How do I get my results?**

You will not be given your results on the day. The results will be sent to your GP (if they referred you for the test. If so you must make an appointment to see them). If you have been referred by a hospital consultant / specialist then you will be sent an appointment to attend the relevant clinic or contacted by letter with the results.





## What did you think of your care?

Scan the QR code or visit [bit.ly/nhsleedsfft](https://bit.ly/nhsleedsfft)

*Your views matter*



© The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust • 2nd edition (Ver 1)  
Developed by: Gill Roe, Leeds Radiology Services  
Produced by: Medical Illustration Services • MID code: 20210507\_004/BP

LN003139  
Publication date  
09/2021  
Review date  
09/2023