



**The Leeds  
Teaching Hospitals**  
NHS Trust

# Having a water soluble swallow

Information for patients



**Leeds**  
Radiology

## What is a water soluble swallow?

This is an x-ray test to look at how you swallow and help us find out why you are having difficulty with swallowing.

You will be asked to drink a cup of water soluble x-ray contrast (x-ray dye) which shows up on x-ray. X-rays will be taken from different angles whilst you stand against or lie on the x-ray table. Trained staff will assist you if necessary throughout the procedure.

You may also be given a different kind of x-ray dye to drink called 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 fully assess your swallowing it is important that you have nothing to eat or drink beforehand.

**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.

## 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 childcare so please make alternative arrangements if necessary.

## How long will I be in the department?

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

## 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.

### *Aspiration*

Sometimes when we swallow some of what we swallow goes into our lungs. If this happens to you in daily life then it may

also happen when you swallow the x-ray dye. 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 department. The risk of becoming unwell because of this is very small.

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

You will be able to eat, drink and resume normal activities immediately. If you are given barium to drink it can sometimes cause some constipation so we advise you to drink plenty of fluids over the following few days to help keep you hydrated.

## **How will 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? Visit [bit.ly/nhsleedsfft](https://bit.ly/nhsleedsfft) *Your views matter***

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