The Leeds Teaching Hospitals
NHS Trust

Fluoroscopy: Contrast swallow and contrast meal

Information for parents and carers

leeds children's hospital
caring about children

Please read this information carefully (even if your child has had the procedure before) as it includes some important information. If you and your child do not follow the instructions, we may be unable to complete the imaging procedure.

For children under two years old

Your child should have nothing to eat or drink for four hours before the examination.

For children over two years old

Your child should have nothing to eat or drink for six hours before the examination.

What is a contrast swallow?

This is an X-ray examination to look at the oesophagus (the tube connecting the mouth to the stomach).

What is a contrast meal?

A contrast meal also looks at the stomach and the small intestines (the first part of the bowel).

What is contrast?

Contrast is a liquid that shows up on X-rays to outline structures in the body so they can be seen. The Radiologist will decide on what type of contrast will be used. Sometimes we use barium which is white and the consistency of thick milkshake other times we use a water based contrast.

Allergies/Conditions:

It is important that you notify us if your child has any allergies or medical conditions ahead of the procedure.

What happens during the examination?

Your child will be given the contrast to drink usually by bottle or straw drink. While your child drinks the contrast we will take X-rays as we watch the contrast move from the mouth, down the oesophagus, into the stomach and then the small intestines.

Sometimes we take delayed X-rays to provide additional information.

Staff involved in the procedure

A Radiologist (a Doctor specialising in X-rays) will carry out the examination and will be assisted by Radiographers. They are specially trained professionals who have undergone the appropriate training and education required to complete your child's examination.

A Radiology Assistant may be present during your child's exam to provide support to both you and your child and the health professional completing the procedure.

Student learners may be present; however, the learning environment is controlled learning and under the supervision of a qualified professional.

Do I need to bring anything?

Please bring a feed and nappies for babies. If they have a favourite cup or bottle this may be very useful. If your child has a special toy or book you can also bring this.

What if my child will not drink the contrast?

We are used to some children not wanting to drink out of a bottle. Sometimes we can use a syringe or their favourite cup. Sometimes we can flavour the contrast with milkshake mix or diluting juice.

What happens to the contrast?

The contrast will pass the normal way when your child uses the toilet.

What aftercare is needed?

After the test your child might have white poo if barium is used. This is normal. To avoid constipation make sure your child drinks plenty of fluids.

When can my child eat and drink again?

Your child can eat and drink again normally straight after the test.

How will I get the results?

A Radiologist will review your child's images and produce a report which is sent back to your child's referrer to share with you.

Your child's referrer should receive the results within four weeks. If you have not had any results after four weeks, please contact your child's referrer.

Are there any associated risks?

X-rays are a type of radiation. Everybody is exposed to small amounts of natural background radiation from the soil, food and air we breathe. The Radiologist and Radiographer will make sure the smallest amount of X-rays are used in the examination. The risk from this radiation dose is low, and the benefits of your child having the examination outweigh these risks.

When you support your child during the examination you will be asked to wear a lead apron. You will also receive a small amount of radiation on top of the natural background radiation you receive annually. This risk is negligible and the benefits of you comforting your child outweigh this risk.

For further information:

- **Your Child's X-ray**
- **Medical imaging: what you need to know**

If you have any concerns about the radiation risk please speak to the Radiologist before the examination begins.

Childcare:

Staff are unable to look after additional children in the department. Therefore, we ask you to make alternative arrangements for other children whilst attending the appointment. If you attend an appointment with additional children with no one to look after them, then the appointment may have to be cancelled and rescheduled.

How to find us:

Our hospitals - Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

Contact details

We are always happy to discuss any specific concerns or queries regarding any imaging investigation.

Appointment Queries - 0113 733 4974

Examination Queries - 0113 392 2336

For further information about Learning Disability and Autism support for your child please contact:

Email - Leedsth-tr.ldautism@nhs.net

Phone - 0113 206 6836

What did you think of your care?

Visit: www.leedsth.nhs.uk/patients/support/feedback-complaints/friends-family-test/

Scan or click the QR code - Your views matter

© The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust • 2nd Edition Version 1

Developed by: Emily Keyte, Team Manager Radiographer
Produced by: Medical Illustration Services • MID code: 20260327_007/CM

LN005030
Publication date
09/2026
Review date
09/2029