

Contrast swallow and contrast meal

Information for parents and carers



leeds children's
hospital

caring about children

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.

What happens during the examination?

Your child will be given the contrast in a bottle to 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.

How long will the examination last?

The initial examination will last approximately 30 minutes. On some occasions we might need to take X-rays of the abdomen at regular intervals after the first part of the test (Follow Through). This can take a few hours so please prepare to stay in the department for up to three hours.

Who will perform the examination?

A Radiologist (a Doctor specialising in X-rays) will carry out the examination and will be assisted by Radiographers and Radiographer Assistants. Occasionally we will have Student Radiographers present who will be training.

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.

I am pregnant can I come with my child?

Yes, you can come into the X-ray room and watch; however we will need you to bring someone else who can stand next to your child during the examination.

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.

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

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.

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.lldautism@nhs.net

Phone - 0113 206 6836



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