

# Having a Barium Meal

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## Introduction

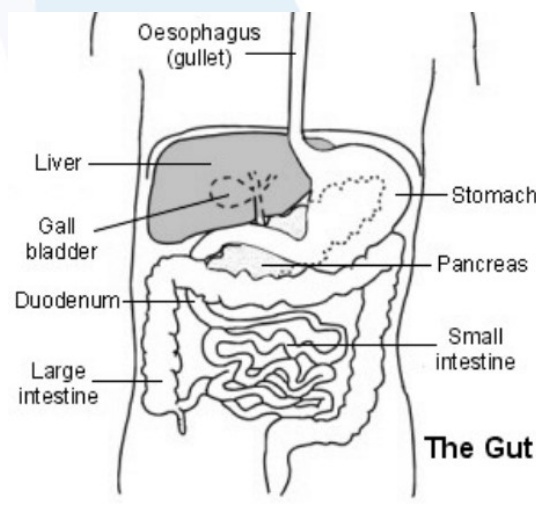
This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having a barium meal. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## What is a barium meal?

A barium meal is an examination of your oesophagus (food pipe), stomach and small bowel. These areas of your body cannot normally be seen on x-ray images unless coated in a white liquid called barium contrast. The procedure is done by:

- a radiologist (a doctor who uses x-rays to diagnose and treat illnesses); and
- a radiographer (a health professional that produces the images used to diagnose and treat illnesses).

The procedure uses fluoroscopic imaging, a type of x-ray, to view images in real time. This makes it possible to see the oesophagus, stomach and small bowel moving in your body. When they are coated with the barium contrast, the radiologist is able to check how they look and how well they are working.



## What happens during a barium meal?

You will be asked to change into a hospital gown. You may also be asked to remove jewellery, dentures, glasses and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the x-ray images. Please tell the radiologist of any medicines you are taking, severe allergies, recent illnesses or other medical conditions.

You will be given some fizzy granules, called carbex granules, to swallow with a small amount of lemon juice-like liquid - this creates gas and helps us see your stomach better. You will then be asked to drink a white liquid called barium. The radiographer will then take a series of x-rays to see the contrast in your oesophagus, stomach and small bowel. You may be repositioned often in order to get pictures from several angles.

The x-ray equipment may also move in order to get the best possible pictures. The radiologist and radiographer will be there with you at all times to help you. The examination takes about 15 minutes, but please allow up to one hour for everything to be completed.

### **How can I prepare for the examination?**

It is important that your stomach and small bowel are empty for this examination.

Please **do not eat or drink anything for six hours before your procedure**. If you need to, you can take small sips of water or clear fluid, but avoid drinking large amounts of fluid as this will dilute the contrast and make your examination less effective. You should continue taking any prescribed medication by a doctor, which you can take with a small amount of water or clear fluid. Please arrive on time for your appointment to help us give a prompt service to everyone.

### **If you have diabetes:**

If you take tablets to control your diabetes, you should have been given a morning appointment. If you take insulin, your appointment should be at 9am. Please contact the x-ray department if this has not been done.

### **If you take tablets for your diabetes**

Miss your morning dose on the day of the examination. Bring your tablets and some food with you to take after the examination.

### **If you are on insulin**

Miss the morning dose of insulin on the day of your examination. You may need to reduce the previous evening's dose. Please bring your insulin and some food with you to take after the examination. If you take long-acting insulin, please do not stop taking it – speak to your diabetes team for advice.

### **Will I feel any pain?**

This examination should be painless. The fizzy granules can cause bloating and you may feel slight discomfort for a short time. If you are concerned, please tell the radiologist or radiographer.

### **What are the risks?**

X-rays are a type of radiation known as ionising radiation. The dose that you get from a medical x-ray is very low and the associated risks are minimal. The radiographer is responsible for making sure that your dose is kept as low as possible and that the benefits of having the examination outweigh any risk.

The barium liquid is not absorbed by the body. It only coats the walls of the oesophagus, stomach and bowel. However, a small risk exists of aspiration (breathing in) of the barium fluid and due care is taken to avoid this.

## Female patients:

X-rays can be harmful for an unborn baby and should be avoided by women who are or may be pregnant. It is recommended that the examination is done within 10 days of the first day of the onset of your menstrual period. If your appointment is not within this time, or if you think you may be pregnant, please contact the x-ray department.

## What happens after the barium meal?

Some people are mildly uncomfortable and bloated after barium studies. However, most people should have little, if any, effects. Once you are happy to leave, you are free to do so. Tea and biscuits are offered after the procedure.

## What do I need to do after I go home?

You should restart your usual diet. The barium contrast may cause some constipation. To prevent this, please drink plenty of fluids and eat plenty of fruit and vegetables (high in fibre). Some people find taking a mild laxative helps – these can be bought over the counter, so please ask your local pharmacist for advice. The barium can often make your stools pale for a few days – this is normal.

## What should I do if I have a problem?

If you feel unwell following the examination or have any concerns, please contact your GP or the x-ray department.

## Will I have a follow-up appointment?

The pictures taken during the examination are carefully studied by the radiologist, who will produce a detailed report.

**The results will be sent to the doctor who referred you for the test. They will discuss the results with you and any treatment you may need.**

You should already have an appointment with the team who referred you. If not, please contact them to arrange one to discuss the results of this test.

There may be students present during your consultation as part of their on-going training. Please let the staff know if you wish to be seen by a qualified professional only.

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