

### **Barium Meal & Swallow/Follow through**

A **barium meal and swallow** is an x-ray examination of your upper digestive tract, the oesophagus (gullet), and the stomach. A drink of a white fluid (barium) will outline the digestive tract and bowel on the x-ray pictures.

#### **Reasons for having this examination**

It allows the doctor to see more clearly what might be causing the problems in your upper digestive tract and/or small bowel. If a more detailed examination or a biopsy of the lining of the tract is needed then **gastroscopy** may be suggested.

#### **Preparation**

If you have insurance, please ensure that you bring your policy number and have obtained an authorisation number. You will need this when you register

**For this examination to be successful your stomach must be empty.**

**It is important that you do not eat or drink anything for 4 to 6 hours before your examination**

**Important – please let us know in advance if:**

- there is a possibility you have **glaucoma**;
- there is a possibility that **you may be pregnant**; or
- you have **diabetes**.

#### **On arrival for your examination**

- On arrival at the Imaging department you will be registered and will need to provide an authorisation code from your insurance company or another proof of payment.
- Once registered, you will be given a gown to change into
- You will meet the radiographer (who takes the x-rays), the radiology nurse and the radiologist (specialist doctor) who will carry out the procedure.
- The nurse and/or radiographer will stay with you throughout the examination.

### **The examination**

- You may be offered an injection to relax the stomach, which may cause some temporary blurring of your vision.
- You will then be asked to drink a cup of white fluid (barium). The white fluid shows up on the x-ray.
- You may be asked to swallow some bicarbonate granules and citric acid prior to drinking the barium. These two ingredients will react to produce gas when they mix in the stomach. The gas will serve to coat the lining of the stomach and upper intestine with the barium fluid as well as expand them. This produces clearer pictures for the radiologist to assess.
- The radiologist will take several x-ray pictures with you in different positions, (standing up and lying down), as the white fluid moves through the stomach and on into the duodenum (upper intestine).
- The test takes about 20 minutes. It is not painful but you may feel a little sick.

A **barium follow through** is similar to the barium meal and swallow but focuses on the small intestine. You will be required to drink at least three glasses of barium mixture and an x-ray will be taken 10-15 minutes after this (this allows time for the barium to reach the small intestine). You will then have to wait for the barium to go through the small intestine until it reaches the large intestine (the colon). An x-ray will be taken approximately every 20 minutes to determine the progress. This process can take a few hours and is individual to each person. We recommend that you anticipate at least 4 hours for this procedure although at times it can be quite a bit faster than this. Once the barium has reached the colon, some more x-ray pictures are taken using a fluoroscopy machine. This part of the examination is carried out by the radiologist.

### **After the examination**

- You can go home as soon as the test is over.
- **Following the injection of the stomach relaxant, we advise you not to drive or operate machinery for two hours after the test.**
- You may find that the white fluid tends to constipate you, so it can be a good idea to take a laxative, and drink plenty of fluids especially water. Otherwise you can eat and drink as normal.
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- The barium will make your faeces white or pale until it has all come out of your gut (after a day or so)
- The barium does not get absorbed into the body. Therefore it is rare for a barium test to cause any other complications or side effects
- You can resume your normal activities.
- The results of the test will be sent to the doctor who requested it.

### **Risks/Side effects**

**There is some risk associated with most procedures. For a barium meal the risks include:**

- **Blurred vision** – caused by the injection given to relax the stomach; it is temporary, and wears off after about 20 minutes and is a very small risk

### **Contact us**

If you have anymore questions or need further information please contact us on:

020 7483 5012 or

020 7586 5959 ext 6014/5157

Or contact the Superintendent, Tanille Spencer, on 020 7483 5066