Barium Swallow and Meal X-Ray Examination

Patient Information
It is very important that you take the time to read this leaflet as it contains information and instructions essential for your examination to be performed successfully.

What is a Barium Swallow/Meal

A Barium Swallow/Meal is a special x-ray study of the tube that leads from your mouth to stomach (oesophagus). The oesophagus does not show up on ordinary x-ray pictures so a quantity of white fluid called barium is used to line the oesophagus and stomach to produce clearer image.

Am I able to eat and drink before my examination?

NO, it is essential that your stomach is completely empty before this examination.

If you have a morning appt (before 12pm), you should not eat or drink anything from midnight the night before your procedure.

If you have an afternoon appt (after 1pm), you should not eat or drink anything after 8am on the day of your procedure.

Important Information

If any the following applies to you, would you please contact the x-ray department before the day of your procedure?

- Are you or might you be pregnant?
- Have you had an oesophageal/stomach biopsy within one week of your appointment date?

What happens during the examination?

You will be asked to wear a gown and stand on a step alongside the x-ray table. You may be asked to take a sherbet like powder off a spoon into your mouth followed by a lemon flavoured liquid. This will fizz up and you will feel like you want to burp. We will then give you a cup of barium to hold in one hand, and asked to take a mouthful and hold it in your mouth. The person doing your test will ask you to swallow and take x-ray pictures as it goes down. The x-ray table may at some point be lay down and you will be asked to turn into various positions throughout the procedure.

Once the procedure is complete you are free to leave the department and to eat as normal. You MUST drink plenty of fluids (tea, water or fruit juice etc) for the next few days to make sure you do not get constipated form the barium. Your bowel motions may be slightly whiter for the next few days, this is normal.

When you arrive at the hospital

Please follow the directions to the radiology or X-ray Department and report to the reception desk.
You will be shown to a private cubicle and given a gown. You may wish to bring your own dressing gown to place over the top (Not essential). You will be able to place your personal items in a basket that you will keep with you.

Who will I see?
Your test will be performed by an Advanced Practitioner Radiographer or Radiologist.

Can I bring a relative/friend?
Yes but they will not be able to accompany you into the x-ray room except in special circumstances.

How long will it take?
This is a fairly quick procedure and may only take 10 to 15 minutes.

Are there any side effects?
Your bowel motions may be slightly whiter for the next few days until the barium leaves your system, this is normal. You MUST drink plenty of fluids (water, tea or fruit juice etc) for the next one to two days as the barium may make you constipated. There are no other side effects.

Can I eat after the procedure?
Yes you can. We recommend that you bring a sandwich and drink with you to have after the procedure. Alternatively there is a WRVS at the main entrance of the hospital.

When will I get the results?
The Radiographer or Radiologist’s report will be sent to your Consultant for your next clinic appointment or if your GP referred you for the test, they should have the results in around 14 days.

Are there any risks and complications?
The Barium swallow examination involves low dose x-rays so the total amount for the test is quite small – about the same as we receive naturally from the environment over a period of about 3-4 months.

Where can I Park my car?
You can park your car on the main hospital site and there is a small charge, so bring some change with you. Please note disabled drivers will also have to pay to park. We now have another car park available to patients on Freckleton Street, and there is a short walk up to the hospital from here. The same parking charges apply.

Further Information
If you have any queries regarding the examination, or suggestions on how we may improve any aspects of our service, please do not hesitate to speak to us either on the day of the examination or contact us on 01942 822397 (Monday to Friday 9:00am to 5:00pm).
Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Albert Edward Infirmary
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Wigan WN1 2NN

Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille and other languages upon request. For more information call 01942 773106.

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