Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

# Barium Swallow and Meal X-Ray Examination

Version number: **9**
Last modified date: **12th November 2026**

# Barium Swallow and Meal X-ray Examination

## Patient Information

## Radiology Department

- Author ID: SO
- Leaflet Ref: Rad 013
- Version: 9
- Leaflet title: Barium Swallow and Meal X-Ray Examination
- Date Produced: February 2026
- Expiry Date: February 2028

# Introduction

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

# What is a Barium Swallow and Meal?

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

# Am I able to eat and drink before my examination?

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

**Please do not eat or drink anything for 6 hours prior to your appointment time.**

# Important Information

If any of the following applies to 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?

1. Disabled people holding a valid Blue Badge, to be displayed in windscreen of vehicle.

**If you are aged between 12 – 55 years then you will be asked to complete a pregnancy questionnaire, including the date of your last period.**

**If you had your last period more than 28 days before the appointment date; please ring the X-ray department for advice on 01942 822398.**

## What happens during the examination?

You will be asked to wear a patient gown and stand on a step alongside the vertical X-Ray table. You may be asked to swallow a sherbet like powder off a spoon followed by a lemon flavoured drink. This will fizz up in your stomach and you will feel like you want to burp.

We will then give you a cup of barium to hold in one hand and ask you to take a mouthful and hold it in your mouth. The person doing your test will tell you when to swallow and take X-Ray pictures as the liquid goes down. The X-Ray table will move to a horizontal position to enable us to lay you down flat whilst you are on it, and you will be asked to turn into various positions throughout the procedure e.g., turn onto your tummy, back or side.

Once the procedure is complete you are free to leave the department, and to eat as normal. You **MUST** ensure you drink plenty of fluids (water, tea or fruit juice etc.) for the next few days to make sure you do not get constipated from 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 Enhanced Practitioner Radiographer or Consultant Radiologist.

## 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.

## Radiation – is it safe?

X-rays are used to produce images in this procedure. X-rays are a type of radiation. We are all exposed to natural background radiation every day; this comes from the sun, the food we eat, and the ground. Being exposed to X-rays carries a small risk, but your consultant feels that this risk is outweighed by the benefits of having this procedure. We take every precaution to minimise the number of X-rays you receive.

## 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 Costa Coffee at the main entrance of the hospital and a canteen.

## 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 General Practitioner (GP) referred you for the test, they should have the results in around 14 days.

## Are there any risks ot complications?

There is a very small chance of aspiration (going down the wrong way into the lungs) with this test. If this happens then we may continue with a different drink.

## Where can I park my car?

You can park your car on the main Royal Albert Edward Infirmary (RAEI) hospital site and there is a charge. Charges apply, and payment can be made using cash or card.

We now have another car park available for patients on Freckleton Street, which is a short walk (0.2 miles) up to the hospital from here.

The following people are eligible to receive free parking at our hospitals:

2. Frequent outpatient attendees, defined as those who are required to attend hospital for an appointment at least three times within a month for at least three months.

3. Parents or guardians of sick children staying overnight in the hospital.

Outpatients and parents / guardians outlined in points two and three need to request an exemption pass from the relevant ward manager or the security office and display this in their vehicle for the duration of their stay.

## Ambulance Transport

If it is necessary for you to have ambulance transport and you live in the Wigan Borough, please telephone **0300 0707 0737** to arrange it. Please inform the ambulance depot that it is for a special X-Ray, and it is essential that you arrive on time.

If you do not live in the Wigan Borough, please contact your GP to arrange your ambulance transport.

## Further Information

If you have any queries regarding the examination, or suggestions on how we may improve any aspect of our service, please do not hesitate to speak to us either on the day of the examination or contact us on **01942 822398** (Monday to Friday 9am until 5pm).



Version number: **9**
Last modified date: **12th November 2026**

All rights reserved © 2026
WWL Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust