

DEPARTMENT OF RADIOLOGY

What is a Barium Swallow?

This test is to look at the throat (pharynx) and oesophagus (gullet) whilst you are swallowing. This test aims to look for problems such as a stricture (narrowing), hiatus hernias, tumours, reflux from the stomach, disorders of swallowing, etc. Your doctor will have explained why you need to have this done.

Barium is a white substance which shows up the outline of the area being examined on X-ray pictures.

The barium X-ray machine is a table which can stand up or lie down, with a camera just in front of you. Within the room there will be either a Radiologist or a Radiographer Advanced Practitioner, and a Radiographic Department Assistant.

How do I prepare for my examination?

You should not eat or drink anything for 4 hours before the test.

If you have diabetes that requires treatment by tablets or injection, you should have received an information sheet with your appointment letter and one of our earlier morning appointment slots.

If you are or may be pregnant, please contact the department before your examination.

What happens when I arrive?

On arrival in the Radiology Department, you will be asked to change into a gown. Please bring a bag to put your clothes into.

What does it involve?

The Radiologist or Radiographer Advanced Practitioner will ask you about your symptoms and explain what is going to happen. During the examination you stand on a step-in front of the X-ray machine whilst X-ray images are taken as you swallow the barium liquid.

We may give you some granules and lemon juice to help us take better pictures. This will cause some gas to be formed in the stomach, giving you a sense of fullness during the test.

The table is laid flat during the examination and further x-ray images are taken with you lying on your back and side. If you are having a barium meal you may also be given an injection into your arm to relax the muscles in your digestive system.

How long will the examination take?

A barium swallow examination takes about 10 - 20 minutes.

After the examination.

You should be able to go home as soon as the test is finished. You can eat and take your medication normally straight after any barium test. You will be given an aftercare sheet.

Are there any side/after effects?

- We would not normally expect you to have any side effects after this examination as the barium does not get absorbed into the body, however the barium may make you constipated. To help prevent this drink plenty of fluids over the next few days to flush the Barium through your system.
- The barium will make your faeces white or pale until it has all passed.
- If you had an injection to relax the muscles in your stomach, it may cause some blurring of your vision for an hour or so. If this happens it is best not to drive until this resolves.

Possible Complications

- Barium can occasionally go down the wrong way. Normally this does not cause any problems; however, on rare occasions treatment with physiotherapy and possibly antibiotics may be required. You are watched carefully during the test to avoid this happening.
- If you are prone to choking on your food or drink, please tell the staff about it when you come for your test.

Information on radiation

As a requirement of the Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2017, all patients undergoing an x-ray examination must be informed of the risk and benefits of proposed exposures.

For information on the risks please read the 'How safe are x-rays?' leaflet in the waiting room on arrival in the radiology department and/ or please find information at the following websites

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/x-ray/#are-x-rays-safe>

<http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-in-general/tests/x-rays>

<https://www.phe-protectionservices.org.uk/radiationandyou/>

If you have any further questions regarding this, please ask a member of the Radiology Department during your visit.

Further information

If you have any further questions or concerns about your barium swallow, please phone the X-Ray Department on 01603 286103. This line is usually staffed Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays 8.30am-4pm, an answer phone is available at all other times. You can also email nnu-tr.fluoroappointments@nhs.net

How to find us:	To access Radiology for your appointment, please follow sign to the Urgent Care Centre/Minors (Emergency Department) in front of Carpark G. On entering, turn immediately left and follow signs to the CT/MR Reception. Please note the change in location, which is likely to be different from your previous visits to Radiology.
Hospital transport:	If you are eligible for hospital transport, please telephone 0333 240 4100
Contact details (Appointments) :	Telephone: 01603 286108 Mon-Fri 8.30am-3.30pm. An answerphone is available outside of these hours, please leave a message. Email: nnu-tr.fluoroappointments@nhs.net Website: http://www.nnuh.nhs.uk/departments/radiology-nnuh