

Division of Imaging

## Information for Patients

# Barium Swallow/Meal Examinations

The aim of this leaflet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about having your examination. It explains the benefits and risks of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come for your examination.

The date and time of your appointment are shown in your appointment letter. If you are unable to come to this appointment, please contact the department as soon as possible. We will not automatically send out a second appointment.

Please read all of this leaflet. It contains important information about how you should prepare for your examination.

## What is a Barium Swallow or Meal?

A barium swallow/meal is a dynamic X-ray examination of your stomach and oesophagus. It is difficult to see the stomach on ordinary X-rays but we can show them by using barium. Barium is a harmless chalky liquid, which we will ask you to drink.

## What happens during Barium Swallow/Meal examination?

The examination will be carried out by a radiologist or an advanced practitioner radiographer. The doctor, radiographer and/or chaperone may be male or female.

- We will ask you to change into an X-ray gown.
- You might be asked to remove certain items of clothing and jewellery.
- The person completing the procedure will ask you to confirm some details including date of birth and pregnancy status.
- We may ask you to swallow some dry powder, followed by a small amount of liquid. This will make gas in your stomach.
- We will then ask you to drink some barium whilst we take fluoroscopy X-ray pictures and videos at different angles.

We will ask you to move into different positions on the X-ray table whilst we look at the pictures on a TV screen.

We may ask you to eat a small piece of bread or biscuit coated in the Barium liquid to help demonstrate the swallow further.

If we need to visualise the stomach better during your examination, we may give you a small injection of a muscle relaxant (Buscopan).

This helps us to get better pictures. This injection may make your eyesight blurred for a short time. It is important that you do not drive for at least 30 minutes after the end of the examination to ensure your vision has returned to normal.

## Will I feel any pain?

You should not feel any pain or discomfort from the examination itself.

However, it is important to get you into the correct position. Holding this position / lying on a table may, for some people, feel uncomfortable, but for the majority of patients this is not the case.

## Are there any risks with this examination?

A Barium Swallow/meal is generally regarded as a very safe test. Problems can occur rarely. These include the following:

### Radiation risk

The use of X-rays may mean that there is a slight increase in the chance of cancer occurring many years after your examination. However, Barium swallow/meals are generally regarded as a low dose procedure.

The dose is equal to the natural radiation we all receive from our surroundings over a period of approximately 1 – 5 years.

It is also worth noting that these risk levels only represent very small additions to the 1 in 3 chance we all have of getting cancer.

The radiographer is responsible for making sure that your dose is kept as low as possible and that the benefits of having the x-ray outweigh any risk.

### Contrast risk

We will need to give you contrast dye to make areas of your body show up more clearly.

The radiographers will complete a checklist to ensure it is safe for you to have the dye and you will be asked to sign this form as a consent, the specific side effects are documented on the checklists that you complete.

The contrast dye that is sometimes used can cause allergic reactions however the staff available will be checking for any risks before we proceed.

## Is there anything I need to inform you of before I attend for my appointment?

### **Pregnancy:**

Radiation can be harmful for an unborn baby. If you are or think you may be pregnant you must tell the radiographer before the examination.

For some examinations the radiographer may check your pregnancy status with you before the examination.

Each examination request will be checked by the radiographer / radiologist to make sure it is properly justified and necessary.

It is often the first point of investigation to help the doctor decide if any other forms of imaging or tests are needed.

## How do I prepare for my Barium Swallow/Meal examination?

You must have nothing to eat or drink for 4 hours before this procedure.

When you arrive to the X-ray department, we may ask you to swallow some dry powder, followed by a small amount of liquid (Carbex). This will make gas in your stomach.

We will then ask you to drink some barium whilst we take fluoroscopy X-ray pictures and videos at different angles.

### **Clothes and accessories:**

There are some clothes that can affect the quality of the x-ray and you may be asked to remove them and wear a hospital gown.

If you do not wish to change into a hospital gown then please do not wear clothing with zips, metal, buttons on that are made from thick material.

You may also be asked to remove jewellery, dentures, glasses and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the x-ray images.

### **Help and support in the department**

If you have any medical problem which you feel may affect your safety in the department, or if you feel you may need any assistance, please let us know when you arrive.

## Do I need to give my permission (consent)?

The radiographer / radiologist will ask you if you are happy for the examination to go ahead. This is called verbal consent and might only involve the radiographer checking you are booked for the correct examination.

If you do not wish to have the examination or are undecided, please ask the radiographer or radiologist so that they can answer any questions you may have.

Remember, it is your decision. You can change your mind at any time and your wishes will be respected.

However, not having the examination may delay your diagnosis as the referring clinician may not have all the needed information.

## How long will it take?

Usually, the examination takes about 20-30 minutes.

The images are recorded, and the radiographer / radiologist will check them briefly to make sure that they can be used to make a diagnosis.

When it is completed you will be allowed to leave the examination room.

The radiographer / radiologist will usually not be able to give you any idea of the results at that time.

## What happens after the Barium Swallow/Meal examination?

### Aftercare

Please drink plenty of water after the test as the barium can make you constipated unless you have been told to limit your water intake by your medical team.

The barium may take several days to pass through your system. Eating high fibre foods such as fruit, vegetables, wholemeal bread etcetera for the next few days may help the barium pass through more quickly.

You may notice that your stools (faeces) are white or, paler during the next few days. This is perfectly normal.

## When will I get my results?

The images will be studied by a radiologist and the results will be sent to the person who referred you for the examination.

The person who performed your examination will tell you how to get your results and how long it will take, as this may be slightly different for each patient.

You may already have an appointment with the clinician who referred you. If not, please contact them to arrange a time to talk about the results and any treatment you may need.

If you are staying in hospital, the results will be given to the doctors looking after you on the ward.

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

You should not have any problems that is a result of the Barium Swallow/Meal examination.

If you feel your condition has changed, or you need further medical advice before receiving your results/after leaving the hospital, please make an appointment with the doctor that referred you, or in an emergency, go to your nearest Emergency Department (ED).

## How can I provide feedback for the appointment I have attended today?

The Division of Imaging welcomes feedback from all our patients. We actively take part in the Friends and Family Test and we complete a patient experience questionnaire every month to obtain feedback on the experiences you have had. Please speak to a member of staff regarding the feedback or there are posters within the department with QR codes so you can complete these online.

## Contact us

For contact information please refer to your appointment letter or if you are an inpatient please direct your queries to one of the medical staff on the ward

### Language and accessible support services:

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

### Your comments and concerns

If you would like to provide feedback you can:

- Ask to speak to the department lead / manager.
- Write to us: Patient Advice and Liaison Services, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Cobbett House, Manchester Royal Infirmary, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9WL.
- Log onto the Patient Opinion website [www.patientopinion.org.uk/](http://www.patientopinion.org.uk/) click on 'Tell your Story'

### If you would like to discuss a concern or make a complaint:

Ask to speak to the department manager – they may be able to help straight away. Inpatients can speak to a senior nurse or manager by contacting the Tell Us Today service on (0161) 701 1999.

Contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (0161) 276 8686 email: [pals@mft.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@mft.nhs.uk). Ask for our information leaflet.

We welcome your feedback so we can continue to improve our services.

### NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

Telephone: 111, 24 hours a day

Website: [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)

## Finally

Some of your questions should have been answered by this leaflet but remember that this is only a starting point for discussion about your treatment with the doctors looking after you. Further information can be obtained by contacting the radiology department that is performing the procedure.