

Division of Imaging

Information for Parents/Carers

Paediatric Barium Swallow/Meal

What is a Barium Swallow/Meal?

A barium swallow or meal is used to look at the oesophagus (food pipe) and stomach in detail.

What happens during the Barium Swallow/Meal examination?

A trained specialist doctor called a Radiologist and radiographer will perform the barium swallow/meal procedure.

- Your child will usually need to put on a hospital gown but may keep their underwear on. Baby clothes with poppers will need to be removed. Older children may prefer to keep their own T-shirt on; however, this must be plain. You might like to bring a spare in case of spillage.
- The person completing the procedure will ask you to confirm some details including date of birth and pregnancy status.
- If you are pregnant, we suggest you bring another member of the family with you to be with your child during the X-ray instead.

You and your child will come into the examination room and your child will need to lie or stand on the couch; don't worry, we will help your child get into the right place.

Barium is a thick white liquid that shows up very well on X-rays. We often add 'milk shake' flavourings; your child will be able to choose. Sometimes we use a clear liquid instead of barium that looks like water which also shows up on X-rays.

Your child will then need to drink the barium during the examination. If your child already has a nasogastric (NG) tube in place, we may use this to put the barium liquid through. If your child has a gastrostomy, we may use this to insert the barium liquid. The Radiologist (X-ray Doctor) will take pictures whilst they are drinking. You will be able to see the pictures on the TV screen. The test usually takes about 20 minutes.

You will need to wear a protective apron during the investigation if you stay with your child.

Will my child feel any pain?

You cannot feel the x-rays so the procedure itself is painless.

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

Are there any risks with this examination?

Radiation risk

Everyone is exposed to ionising radiation (for example from gamma rays from space, air travel, natural radiation from the ground) all the time. This is one of the causes of cancer and other illnesses.

This test will give your child a small extra dose of ionising radiation. Your doctors have taken this into account when asking your child to have this test and believe that this the best test for you or your child.

Individuals of child bearing capacity of 12 years and over will be asked to tell us the first day of their last menstrual period so that we can avoid giving radiation to an unborn baby unless it is absolutely necessary for the test to work. This is because the risk is slightly greater for unborn children.

Contrast risk

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

The radiographers will complete a checklist to ensure it is safe 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 or child are or think that there is a possibility of being pregnant you must tell the radiographer before the examination.

For some examinations the radiographer may check pregnancy status 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.

What do I need to do before bringing my child into hospital?

To make sure the images are of good quality, your child should be starved for four hours. If your child has a favourite bottle or beaker cup you may like to bring it with you. We will give older children a cup and straw.

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 / 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 minutes.

What happens after the Barium Swallow/Meal examination?

When enough pictures have been taken, your child will be able to get off the bed and get dressed. If they are not having any further tests or scans, you will be free to go home.

Children can eat and drink straight after the barium test and should drink plenty of fluids for the next 24 hours as barium can cause constipation. In all children barium may be visible in the bowel motions for up to a couple of days.

When will I get my results?

The Doctor performing the examination may be able to give you a provisional result of the test but often the images are reviewed with other tests your child may be having, in which case a final report will be sent to your referring Consultant in two to three weeks.

Your child's Consultant will discuss the results with you at their next appointment or they may write to you.

What should I do if I have a problem?

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

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

Are there any alternatives?

Various types of scans such as CT, ultrasound and X-rays can show the size and shape of your child's digestive system, but not how it is working. The results of the scan are used to plan your child's treatment.

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, 1st Floor, Cobbett House, Manchester Royal Infirmary, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9WL.
- Log onto the Patient Opinion website 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. 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

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.