

# Your barium swallow or meal and/or follow through

**Please note:**

**Female patients aged 12-55 years (or if you are having regular menstrual cycles):**

You must notify the department if:

- this appointment is not within 10 days of the start of your last period
- there is a possibility that you may be pregnant.

If either of these applies, a new appointment will be made.

**Diabetic patients**

If you are diabetic requiring insulin and your appointment is not between 9am and 10am, please phone the number on the front of this leaflet as we like to perform your examination early in the morning.

On the morning of your examination, please do not have any breakfast and do not take your insulin. Bring them with you so that you can take them immediately after your examination.

This leaflet describes three examinations. Your doctor may have asked for one or all three. Please read carefully about the examinations your doctor has asked us to perform on you.

**What is a barium swallow?**

A barium swallow is an examination of the gullet, or oesophagus and stomach.

**What is a barium meal?**

A barium meal is an examination of the gullet, or stomach and beginning portion of the small bowel (or intestines).

**What is a barium follow-through?**

A barium follow through is an examination of the stomach, small bowel (or intestines) and the point where the small bowel joins the large bowel (or colon).

**What is barium?**

Barium is a very dense contrast medium that shows up very clearly on x-ray images. It is a thick, white liquid with added fruit flavour.

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|----------------|---|
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| Next review    | November 2018                                     |

### **How is a barium swallow / meal examination performed?**

Although x-ray images show your insides, it is necessary to have you drink this barium in order to clearly see the internal workings of your digestive tract.

Therefore, both of these procedures involve you drinking this fruity flavoured barium while a radiologist (doctor) or advanced practitioner watches on a special x-ray television.

You may be given a sachet of white granules to swallow, followed by a small amount of a lemon-flavoured clear fluid. This will create gas which will distend your stomach and provide even better images. It is important to suppress the urge to belch.

Occasionally, your stomach may have spasms which make it difficult to visualise the stomach lining, even with the gas granules. It may then be necessary to give you a small injection that will relax the digestive tract, allowing it to expand. Please note: if you suffer from glaucoma or have a family history of glaucoma, inform someone in the x-ray room before the injection. If you do have this injection, you may suffer from blurred vision for 20 to 30 minutes afterwards. Please ensure that your vision has returned to normal before leaving the department.

### **How long will my barium meal and / or swallow take?**

The entire procedure usually takes about 20 minutes. Occasionally, the radiologist will ask that a 'delay' image be taken on you. You will then be asked to sit in the waiting room until it is time for this 'delay' image.

Please inform a member of staff of any discomfort you may experience, although this rarely occurs.

### **How is a barium follow-through examination performed?**

You will be asked to drink a few cups of barium while sitting in the waiting area. When you have finished drinking the barium, you will be taken into an x-ray room and asked to lie on the x-ray table to have an x-ray of your abdomen. You will then be asked to be seated in the waiting area until it is time for your next x-ray image. This sequence will continue at different time intervals. The timing is determined by the speed at which the barium passes through your small bowel (usually every 15 minutes to an hour) and is decided after reviewing each subsequent image. When the barium has reached the point where the small bowel meets the large bowel, you will usually be taken into a special x-ray room where the radiologist or advanced practitioner will view this area on a television monitor and take special pictures.

### **How long will my barium follow through take?**

You can expect the examination to take a minimum of an hour but it can take as much as four hours or more. It all depends on how quickly the barium passes through your intestines. No two people are alike.

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## Preparation for your barium examination

### For a morning appointment:

- nothing to eat for four hours before your examination time. You may still drink clear fluids.

### For an afternoon appointment:

- on the morning of your examination, you may have breakfast by 8am but nothing to eat after this time. You may still drink clear fluids.

### After the examination

You can resume your normal routine and medications. It is important that you drink plenty of fluids for the next 4-6 hours.

### If you have the injection to relax your bowel

This may cause temporary difficulty with your vision which usually lasts for about 30 minutes. It is advised that you do not drive until your eyesight has recovered. If your eyesight does not return to normal before you leave the x-ray department or you experience any other difficulty, please notify a member of staff.

### Risks and benefits

All medical procedures carry some risks. With this procedure, that risk would be radiation. All of our equipment is state-of-the-art and well within its natural working life expectancy. It has routine service checks and is well maintained. Radiation doses are as kept as small as practicable.

Before proceeding, we always weigh any risks against the benefits that may be gained from any procedure.

Your doctor and our radiology team will have agreed that the benefits to you will outweigh any risk of having this procedure. If you have any questions or do not wish to proceed, please contact us as soon as possible or speak to a member of our staff.

### Additional information

If you have any questions about your examination please contact the department. The number can be found on the front of this leaflet.

If you have access to the internet and would like more information of how a typical radiology department operates, visit [www.goingfora.com](http://www.goingfora.com). This is a good website produced and maintained by the Royal College of Radiologists.

Car parking is available within the hospital grounds. A ticket system is in operation – please bring some change for the ticket machine. Parking is, at best difficult, and the car parks are situated some distance from the Radiology Department.

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Please allow adequate time so that you and anyone accompanying you can arrive in time for your appointment.

We are always trying to improve our service to patients. We welcome your comments.

If you have any comments please inform a member of staff. If you prefer, you can write to the Radiology Manager at the address on the front of this leaflet.

### **Your photographic records**

As part of your treatment, a photographic record may be made, eg x-ray, clinical photograph or video which will be kept in your health record in confidence, seen only by those involved in your care or quality check. However, they are extremely important for teaching or medical research, so we may request your written consent to use yours, in which case your personal details would be taken out so you cannot be identified.

### **Verifying your identity**

When you attend hospital you will be asked to confirm your first and last name, date of birth, postcode and NHS number if you know it, and to let us know if you have any allergies.

### **Comments, compliments or complaints about your care**

Please call PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) on freephone 0800 783 7328, pick up a leaflet or visit [www.colchesterhospital.nhs.uk](http://www.colchesterhospital.nhs.uk)

### **Your views**

If you or a family member has recently been in Colchester General Hospital, you can tell us about your experience by searching for 'Colchester' on the NHS Choices website [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk), by writing to the address on the front of this leaflet, by emailing your comments to [info@colchesterhospital.nhs.uk](mailto:info@colchesterhospital.nhs.uk) or by filling in a questionnaire at the hospital telling us if you would recommend our service to a friend or family member.

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