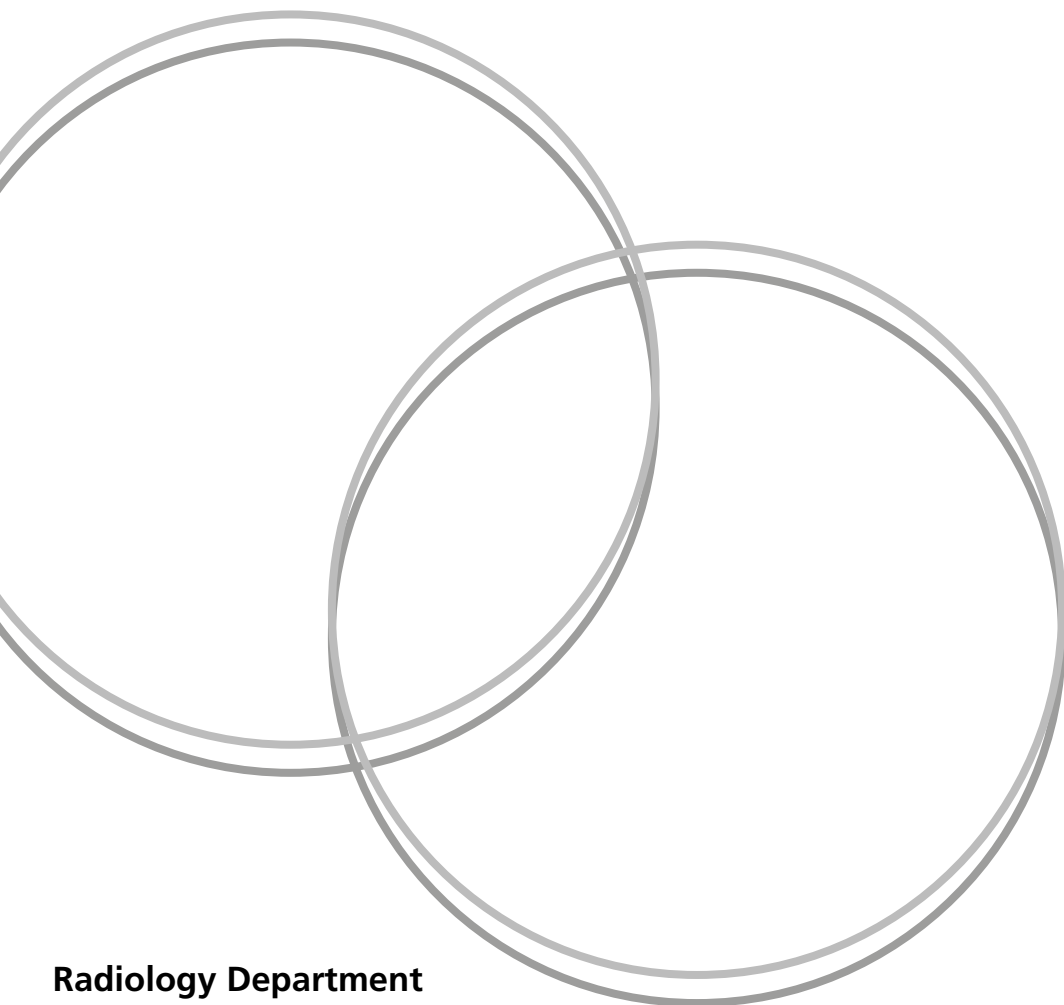




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Small bowel follow through examination

Information for patients



Radiology Department

# Small bowel follow through examination

The X-ray department has received a request for you to have a Small bowel follow through examination. This leaflet tells you the purpose of the examination, what's involved and what the risks are. We will also send you an appointment letter and an information sheet which tells you exactly how you need to prepare for this examination.

- If you cannot attend your appointment, please let us know **as soon as possible**. and feel that you need an earlier in the day appointment, please call the appointments team on your letter to arrange this.
- If you are diabetic, please telephone us as soon as possible as we may need to send you additional information about your appointment.
- For people between the ages of 12-55 years it is important to carry out this examination within 10 days of the start of your menstrual cycle (period). This is because the examination should usually be performed when we can be sure that you are not pregnant. If the appointment date does not fall within this time please telephone for another appointment. (If you are using contraception i.e.: pill, injection or the coil which is within its recommended dates or not missed a pill dose, this is sufficient for the pregnancy form).
- If you weigh more than 196kg or 31 stone, please tell us immediately.
- **If you need hospital transport to reach the hospital, please arrange this with your GP prior to the appointment.**

You can contact us on: **01865 228 944**  
(9.30a.m. to 4.30p.m., Monday to Friday)

Contact details are also on the front of your appointment letter.

## **What is a small bowel follow through examination?**

This is an X-ray test to examine the middle part of the intestine called the small bowel. This is always a difficult area to examine because it is not usually possible to get a camera to this area. A way to see this part of the bowel is for you to drink some white chalky liquid called barium which shows up on X-ray. We then take X-ray pictures over a period of time while the barium makes its way through your bowel. The purpose of the test is to try to find out what may be causing your symptoms (e.g. stomach pain, weight loss).

## **Can I bring a relative or friend?**

Yes, but for reasons of safety they will not be able to accompany you into the X-ray room except in very special circumstances.

## **Are there any risks?**

### **Exposure to radiation:**

This is a low dose examination and the amount of radiation is kept to a minimum. This is equivalent to the amount of background radiation that you naturally receive over 12-15 months.

Your doctor has recommended this examination because they feel that the benefits are greater than the risk of not having the examination. Even so, this test cannot be guaranteed to detect all abnormalities in the small bowel.

# What happens at home before the examination?

In order for the doctor to see the small bowel clearly, it must be relatively empty. To do this we will ask you to follow a special low residue diet the day before the test.

## **DIET:**

Please follow these instructions on the **day before your appointment**

## **BREAKFAST and LUNCH:**

You can choose from the following:

- Rice Krispies/ Cornflakes with up to 100mls milk (BREAKFAST ONLY)
- 2 slices of white bread
- cottage/cream cheese/ butter or honey
- 1-2 boiled eggs
- lean meat or fish
- small potato (no skin) or plain white rice or white pasta

## **DRINKS:**

Before midday: tea/coffee (with milk)/ water or clear fluids.

After midday: BLACK tea/coffee, water or clear fluids **(NO MILK)**

## **SUPPER (evening):**

No solid food OR dairy products allowed until AFTER the procedure the next day:

- Clear soup or drinks from stock or meat extract cubes.
- Clear jelly

**Please stop taking medications which are designed to make you less constipated (e.g. Fybogel) two days before the test.**

All other medication can be taken as normal up to the night before your appointment.

**Please have no food, drink or tablets for 6 hours before the time of your appointment.** Your tablets can be brought with you to take as soon as your examination is completed.

## **What happens during the examination?**

The length of this procedure varies and depends on the individual (i.e. the time it takes for the barium to pass through your bowel). The test usually lasts about 2 hours but can last all day (this is rare).

You will be asked to change into a hospital gown to make sure that no metal coins/objects or bra straps are seen on the pictures. If you need to go to the toilet you should do this before the test begins.

We will give you a medicine (called Metaclopramide or Gastrografin) which will slightly reduce the time it takes for the barium to pass through your bowel and should therefore reduce the examination time. We will then ask you to drink some chalky white barium liquid and then take X-ray pictures over time as this progresses through your bowel. We will ask you to continue drinking the liquid barium in between the pictures.

When the barium drink reaches the last bit of your small bowel, we may bring you into a different room and look at your bowel with a different camera. We may press on your tummy during this time to spread the bowel loops apart. We need to make sure that we see the very last point of the small bowel. Usually this happens within 2 hours but this may take longer. If it does take longer we may ask you to sit outside the room and from time to time we will call you back to see how things are progressing.

## Side effects and what happens after the examination?

As we have asked you to drink a large amount of liquid, this may pass through quickly into your large bowel and give you diarrhoea.

- Therefore, it is advisable to stay close to a toilet for a while. You may want to have a drink and some food before you go while you are waiting for the liquid to come through so you do not get caught out on your journey home.
- **Drink plenty of fluids (several extra glasses of water each day to quench thirst).** The barium will make your stools pale for the next few days. Keep drinking extra until your stools return to normal. It is important to wash away the barium inside your bowel so that it does not harden inside you and cause constipation.
- Eating a high fibre diet like bran or wholemeal bread can help, but the main thing is to drink plenty.
- If you have problems with your heart or water retention, you may not be able to drink this much safely. If you are in any doubt, or you find you become breathless or your legs swell up, contact your GP.

## **When and how will I know the result of the examination?**

The pictures of your small bowel will be examined by a radiologist, who will then send a report of the results to the person who referred you.

- If your GP referred you the report is sent to them and you can make an appointment to see them 10 days later.
- If a doctor/consultant from the outpatient department referred you then the result will be sent out in time for your next outpatient appointment. If you do not yet have another outpatient appointment and do not hear anything within three weeks, you should telephone the consultant's secretary for advice.

## **Questions or concerns**

If you have any questions you can telephone us on the number on the front of your appointment letter.

## **Further information**

Further information can be found on the following websites:

[www.rcr.ac.uk](http://www.rcr.ac.uk) (Royal College of Radiologists)

[www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/forpatients/departments/departments.aspx](http://www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/forpatients/departments/departments.aspx)

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

**If you are unable to keep your appointment, please help us by contacting the Radiology appointments team as soon as possible. Your appointment slot can then be given to someone else, and you will be offered an alternative date and time.**

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Authors: Carol Picking, Gastrointestinal Advanced Practitioner  
Michael North, Gastrointestinal Consultant Radiologist

November 2022

Review: November 2025

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



*Making a difference across our hospitals*

[charity@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:charity@ouh.nhs.uk) | 01865 743 444 | [hospitalcharity.co.uk](http://hospitalcharity.co.uk)

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

