

Radiology Department

Barium Enema Examination

Information for patients



Barium Enema examination

The X-ray department has received a request for you to have a Barium Enema 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**. Please telephone us on the number on the front of your appointment letter.
- If you are diabetic, please telephone us as soon as possible as we may need to send you additional information about your appointment.
- If you are female and of childbearing age, i.e. up to 55 years of age, we will ask you to complete a form asking about the dates of your periods. (You may already have done this.) This is because the examination should usually only be performed when we can be sure that you are not pregnant. Please complete and return this form as soon as possible so that we can give you an appropriate appointment date.
- If you weigh more than 146 kg or 23 stone, please tell us immediately.

If you need hospital transport to reach the hospital, please tell us as soon as possible.

What is a Barium Enema examination?

This is an X-ray examination of part of your gut – called the large bowel. The purpose of the test is to try to find out what may be causing your symptoms (e.g.: a change in bowel habit, weight loss or anaemia).

A small plastic tube is inserted into your back passage and through this we put a white liquid called barium that shows up your bowel on X-ray. We then put some air into your bowel to inflate it – this allows us to see the bowel clearly. An injection may also be given, called Buscopan, which relaxes you bowel and makes you more comfortable. It also improves the quality of the pictures.

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 about a year.
- There is a very small risk (1 in 2000 patients) of a small tear in the lining of the colon or rectum. This usually occurs only if the patient also has severe bowel inflammation.
- There is a slight risk from the Buscopan injection (to relax the bowel and make the examination more comfortable) to patients who have glaucoma or heart rhythm problems. We will ask if you have heart disease or glaucoma before giving you the injection.

- There may be side-effects from the bowel preparation (Picolax). These are listed in the manufacturer's information sheet which comes with the Picolax.

These risks are similar to those which could occur with other methods of examining the large bowel.

Your doctor has recommended this examination because he/she feels 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 bowel.

What happens at home before the examination?

In order for the doctor to see the large bowel clearly, it must be empty. To do this we will ask you to take a laxative called Picolax the day before the test. This will make you empty your bowels frequently. **Please read the separate patient information sheet about how to take the laxative and the special diet instructions. You should also read the manufacturer's information sheet that comes with the Picolax that tells you about the side effects.**

- Stay near a toilet for the whole day.
- Drink fluid as instructed. This should help prevent headaches or dizziness caused by dehydration.
- The laxative may give you abdominal discomfort.
- You may find that you have a sore bottom after taking the laxative. Sudocrem is usually available from any pharmacy and should help to relieve this.
- Please telephone us if you vomit up the laxatives as it is likely that your bowel will not be clean and we might need to rearrange your appointment.

- Very rarely the laxative can cause the potassium level in your blood to drop if you are also taking diuretics (water tablets) or steroid tablets. If you are taking these medications you should check with your GP to see if you need potassium supplements.
- If you take any drugs that cause constipation, you should stop taking them 4 days before the examination. If in doubt ask your GP. Please continue to take all your other medication as normal.
- If you are taking iron tablets you should stop taking them 7 days before the examination because they also cause constipation.
- Please telephone us if you have had a biopsy of the large bowel in the 7 days before your appointment.

What happens during the examination?

The procedure usually lasts about 40 minutes but you may be at the hospital longer if we need to see emergency patients.

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.

Firstly, we will ask you to lie on your left side while the tube is gently inserted into the back passage. Barium liquid is then inserted into your bowel which may make you feel bloated and 'full'. You will need to clench your bottom tightly to prevent leakage – if any does leak, do not worry, just tell us. Once the liquid has reached the end of your large bowel, we will let most of it come out so that only a coating of barium is left on your bowel. You may be given a small injection of Buscopan into a vein in the arm/hand, which relaxes the bowel and makes you more comfortable. It also improves the quality of the pictures.

Some air will then be puffed in through the tube, which may make you feel bloated and 'full'. We will ask you to roll into

different positions so that we can take pictures. The pictures will be checked to make sure we have clear pictures of your bowel.

After we have taken all the necessary pictures the tube is removed and you will be able to use the toilet.

Side effects and what happens after the examination?

You may want to rest at home for the remainder of the day.

- It is normal to get abdominal cramp-like pains over the next few hours while the air we have put in works its way out.
- You may have some diarrhoea.
- **Drink plenty of fluids (several glasses of water each day to quench thirst).** The barium will make your motions whitish for the next few days. Keep drinking extra fluids until your stools are no longer whiter than your normal. It is important to wash away the barium inside your bowel so that it does not harden inside you and cause constipation or even block the toilet!
- 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 with water retention, you may not be able to drink this much safely. If in doubt or you find you become breathless or your legs swell up, contact your GP.
- The injection given may blur your eyesight over the next few hours. **Do not drive or operate dangerous machinery until you are sure your eyesight is back to normal.**
- Very rarely, in people who are already at risk of glaucoma, the injection can cause a very painful red eye. **If this happens you should call your GP as an emergency.**

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

The pictures of your bowel will be examined by the 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 him or her 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 (Royal College of Radiologists)

www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/forpatients/departments/departments.aspx

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473**. When we receive your call we may transfer you to an interpreter. This can take some time, so please be patient.

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