

Radiology Department

Small bowel follow through examination

Information for patients



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**. 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 old, 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 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 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 small bowel.

What happens at home before the examination?

In order for the doctor to see the small bowel clearly, it must be empty. To do this we will ask you to follow a special diet the day before the test. In some cases you will also be asked to take a mild laxative. This should have the effect of making you empty your bowels frequently.

- The laxative may dehydrate you so drink plenty of fluids. This should prevent you from getting a headache or feeling dizzy.
- We will give you a special diet sheet for the day before the test. This is enclosed with your appointment letter.

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) 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 will 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. It is often a good idea to have a cup of tea and a bun in the League of Friends while you are waiting for the liquid to come through so that you do not get caught short in the car!
- **Drink plenty of fluids (several extra glasses of water each day to quench thirst).** The barium will make your stools whitish for the next few days. Keep drinking extra 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 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 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 she 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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