

Paediatric Barium Swallow/Meal

Information for parents and carers



Your doctor has referred your child for a barium swallow/meal to look at their food pipe and stomach.

We have written this information leaflet to help you and your child to understand this test. We hope it answers some of the questions you both may have and helps you and your child to feel more prepared and relaxed.

What is a barium swallow/meal?

A barium swallow/meal uses a special liquid to allow the X-ray doctor (radiologist) to see your child's oesophagus (food pipe or gullet), stomach and the first part of their intestines using an X-ray camera.

What does this test involve?

Your child will be asked to drink a special drink called barium. This is a white liquid with a chalky texture. It is not radioactive but is used as it shows up well on X-ray images.

Your child will need to drink the barium whilst lying on a couch with the X-ray camera over their tummy (about 75cm away). They may need to change position, so you will be asked to stay close to them at all times to make sure they are safe.

If your child is able to, they will usually be asked to drink using a straw so that they can stay lying down. If they are not able to use a straw they can drink the barium from a bottle or beaker. If they are currently being fed through a nasogastric (NG) tube, we will use that to give them the barium.

The drink is not unpleasant, but some children find it difficult to drink as much as is needed (usually less than a beaker full). If they would like, your child can choose a flavour which can be mixed with the barium, but they are still likely to need lots of encouragement from you to drink the desired amount.

You and your child will be able to see the X-ray pictures of the barium moving through their body on the TV screen. Most children find this quite fascinating to watch and it can be a good way to encourage them to keep drinking the barium.

How long does this test last?

The time the test takes to complete varies from child to child, but should take no longer than 20-30 minutes.

Normally we ask for one parent/carer to stay next to your child during the test to offer support and reassurance, and to make sure they are safe whilst moving around during the X-ray. You will be asked to wear a protective lead apron, which is quite heavy. This helps to protect your body from the X-rays during the test.

We cannot allow you to stay close to your child if there is any chance that you may be pregnant, as the radiation from the X-rays can be harmful to an unborn baby. However, you can remain in the room but behind the protective lead glass screen.

If you think you may be pregnant, you may want to bring someone else with you to support your child during the test.

We also cannot allow children under 16 to come into the X-ray room as they may also be affected by the X-rays. If you have younger children with you, please bring someone else to care for them in the waiting room while we are carrying out the test.

Are there any risks?

Everyone is exposed to ionising radiation all the time (for example, from gamma rays from space, air travel, natural radiation from the ground). This test will give your child a small extra dose of ionising radiation in the form of X-rays. Your doctors have taken this into account when asking your child to have this test and believe that, despite this small additional exposure to radiation, it is still in their best interest for them to have the test. We can adjust the levels of radiation used for the X-rays so that we only use the lowest dose we need to get the required images.

If your child is female and aged 12 or over, you will be asked to complete a form to record the date of her last period. As the test uses radiation, we have to make sure that she is not pregnant before we start the examination.

The form still needs to be completed even if she has not yet started her periods, as we still have to legally confirm that she could not be pregnant.

What do I need to bring with me?

Please bring:

- comforters or special toys which are familiar to your child
- activities to entertain your child whilst waiting (there are some toys/games/books/magazines in the waiting room)
- feeding bottle and teat or a familiar beaker for younger children
- a drink and something to eat for you and your child after the test is finished.

Your child may wear their own clothes if they prefer, as long as there are no metal poppers, metalwork on bras, zips or glittery motifs, especially on the chest, as these show up on the X-ray pictures. If you do not have any suitable clothing we can supply a hospital gown for them to wear. You may like to bring spare clothing for younger children in case of any spillages.

Is there anything I should do to prepare my child?

Please make sure you follow the instructions in your child's appointment letter, including any fasting instructions that say when they should stop eating and drinking.

It is important that you talk with your child about their visit to hospital and the test at a level you think they will understand. Involve them in preparing to come for the test. Books and stories might help with this. If they are well prepared and know what to expect, they will be happier to go along with what we will ask them to do during the test. It may also help them to cope better afterwards and to not be upset by the experience.

Is there anything I need to do after the test?

Once the test is complete your child can go back to their usual eating and drinking patterns. The barium will make your child's stools pale in colour for 24-48 hours after the test; this is nothing to worry about. Sometimes barium can cause constipation, so it is a good idea for your child to drink plenty of fluid to help flush it through their digestive system.

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

The radiologist who carries out the test will be able to talk to you about what they have initially seen on the X-ray images at the end of the examination.

A formal report will be sent within the next few days to the person who referred your child for the test.

The results will be discussed at your child's next outpatient appointment. If they do not have one booked or you do not hear anything within three weeks, please telephone your referring doctor for advice.

Please note:

If your child has any special needs or requirements, or you would like more information about the test, please telephone the Radiology Department on the number given in your appointment letter.

How to contact us

For appointment queries:

Tel: **01865 228 944**

(8.30am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday)

For pre-test queries:

Children's Radiology Reception

Tel: **01865 231 950**

(8.30am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday)

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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