

Barium Swallow Pre- & Post-Procedure Instructions

What is a Barium Swallow?

A barium swallow is a radiographic (X-ray) examination of the pharynx (back of mouth and throat) and the esophagus (the hollow tube of muscle extending from below the tongue to the stomach). Swallowing a liquid suspension called barium sulfate (barium) makes the pharynx and esophagus visible on X-ray. Barium is a dry, white, chalky powder that is mixed with water to make a thick, milkshake-like drink.

How do I prepare for this procedure?

- Do not eat or drink for 4 hours prior to the procedure.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing to your exam. You will receive a gown to wear during the procedure.
- Remove metal objects, including jewelry, eyeglasses, dentures and hairpins. They may affect the acquired images. Leave them at home or remove prior to the scan.

What happens during the procedure?

After you swallow the barium drink it will coat the inside walls of the pharynx and esophagus. This will make the swallowing motion, inside wall lining, and size and shape of these organs visible on X-ray. As you swallow the barium, the radiologist will take single pictures, a series of X-rays, or a video (fluoroscopy) to observe the barium moving through the esophagus. Depending upon the patient, the exam typically takes 1 hour or less from the time of your appointment to finishing the exam.

What happens after my procedure?

- You will have no restrictions and be able to go home directly after the procedure.
- Drink plenty of fluids to help flush the barium out of your system.
- A mild laxative such as a single dose of Milk of Magnesia will help clear the barium from your intestine.
- The barium may make your stool white for several days.

Who should I call if I have questions?

- During office hours (Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.) call the Department of Radiology at: 734-936-4500. You may also call the doctor or clinic who ordered this test for you.
- After hours, holidays, and on weekends call Hospital Paging at (734) 936-6267 and ask for the Radiology Resident on call.

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