

Patient information leaflet

Barium meal

Radiology department

Introduction

We hope this guide will answer your questions about your barium meal examination. Please contact the team if you require further information via the details at the end of this leaflet.

What is a Barium Meal?

A barium meal is an examination of your stomach and your oesophagus (or gullet), the tube between your mouth and stomach. You will be asked to drink a white liquid that contains barium sulphate which is visible on x-rays to see what happens when you swallow.

The test is carried out by a radiologist (a doctor who uses x-ray to diagnose and treat conditions), and a radiographer (a health care professional that helps facilitate the x-ray images safely). Sometimes, an assistant or a student radiographer may also be present.

What are the alternatives?

The main alternative to a barium meal is a gastroscopy (also called an endoscopy). This test looks inside your oesophagus, stomach and the first part of your small intestine. It involves using a narrow, flexible, tube-like telescopic camera called a gastroscope to look inside, each examination has their specific advantages and drawbacks.

Currently, this study has been considered as the most appropriate test for you or may be part of a range of examinations needed to get a diagnosis.

If you have any questions regarding what is the most fitting test for you, please speak to your referring clinical doctor to explain to you the available options.

Why do I need a Barium Meal?

Your clinical doctor has referred you for a barium meal examination to help make a diagnosis or to guide further treatment plans.

If you don't want to you can opt not to go ahead with the barium meal examination we will write to your referring doctor to let them know.

Are there any risks?

X-ray radiation: All x-ray procedures involve exposure to radiation in varying amounts. The dose you get from a medical x-ray is very low and your doctor has determined that the benefits of having the examination outweigh potential risks.

The radiographer is present throughout your test making sure that the dose is kept as low as reasonably possible and the duration and level of x-rays are kept to a minimum.

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Contrast: Very rarely, you may have an allergic reaction to the barium contrast medium. At any point during or after the examination, if you develop itching or difficulty breathing, tell your radiographer or doctor immediately.

Constipation: There is a possibility that you will have some constipation and you may find that your faeces are white. This is due to the barium we use for the examination. The barium usually clears from your system within 24 hours.

Patients aged 12 to 55, could you be pregnant? X-rays can be harmful to an unborn baby and should be avoided by patients who are or may be pregnant. It is recommended that the examination is performed within 10 days of the first day of your menstrual period.

If your appointment is not within this time or if you think you may be pregnant, please contact the X-ray department before your appointment. When you arrive for your test, you will be asked when your last period started. If it is more than 10 days earlier, your appointment may be postponed.

Breastfeeding: On the day of your examination, you will be given a drink which contains Barium Sulphate. These agents are low risk contrast agents. No special precautions are required and you can carry on breastfeeding as normal. However, if you have any concerns you may want to express some breast milk prior to your appointment.

Preparing for your procedure

Could you please have nothing to eat or drink for 6 hours before your examination.

Please leave jewellery and valuables at home.

Please contact the booking team;

- If you plan to use hospital transport or require a hoist transfer
- If you are, or might be pregnant
- If you are an insulin dependent diabetic
- If you have glaucoma
- If you weigh over 30 stone/190 kilograms
- If you require an interpreter – please inform us as soon as you receive your appointment letter, and we will arrange an interpreter for you.

If you are unsure or have questions about your preparation, contact your doctor or the X-ray department for advice.

Allergies

If you have asthma or any allergies, especially to barium please inform us in advance.

Medication

Please do not take any medication that requires food till after your examination, you can take medication that can be taken with water.

Getting to us

When attending The Princess Alexandra Hospital (Hamstel Road, Harlow, Essex, CM20 1QX), follow the signage to the radiology reception, which is located on the ground floor, green zone. Please let the receptionists know that you have arrived for your appointment.

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When should I arrive?

Please arrive in the radiology department at your given appointment time. A notification through text or letter should have been sent to you to confirm this appointment.

Can someone stay with me in the hospital?

You may have a friend or relative attend with you, but they will be asked to stay in the waiting area while you have your procedure.

Children are not allowed in the waiting area unattended. Our staff are not permitted to supervise children, so please ensure child care arrangements are in place to avoid your tests being rescheduled.

The day of the procedure

You will be shown to a cubicle and asked to undress and put on a gown; please bring a dressing gown if you have one. You may also be asked to remove jewellery, dentures, glasses, or other metal objects, which may show up on the X-rays.

The procedure

Your identification will be checked by a nurse and radiographer, a brief history will be taken; please tell the radiologist what medication, severe allergies, choking episodes or other medical conditions, such as thyroid disease and diabetes you may have.

Before the procedure, the interventional radiologist will explain the procedure and ask you to sign a consent form.

Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have and, remember that even at this stage, you can decide against going ahead with the procedure if you so wish.

At the beginning of the examination you will be asked to swallow a small amount of powder which creates gas so that the oesophagus and stomach can be seen more clearly.

You will then be given a chalky drink (barium). This is to make your stomach visible on the X-rays.

The radiologist (doctor) will then take several X-rays with you standing up and lying down on the X-ray couch which may move or tilt too, whilst looking at your digestive system on the x-ray monitor.

Your radiographer and radiologist will be with you the whole time during the procedure and will explain what is happening or what you need to do on the day. If you have any questions or concerns, it is OK to ask.

How long will this take? This examination can take up to 25 minutes, you should be prepared to be in the department for up to an hour

Will I need an injection? Occasionally, patients are given a small injection of hyoscine butylbromide (Buscopan) in the arm to help relax the muscles of the stomach. After this injection you may experience some dryness of your mouth and blurred vision. This will disappear after a few minutes and causes no ill effect.

After the procedure

At the end of the test, you will be able to go home immediately or when you feel ready. You can eat or drink normally and take your normal medications.

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PLEASE DRINK PLENTY OF FLUIDS

Can I drive after my procedure?

You are able to drive as soon as you are discharged from the department.

How soon can I return to work?

You are able to return to work as soon as discharged from the department

When will I get my results?

You will not know the results of your examination immediately. The radiologist will report their findings to the clinician who arranged your procedure, who will discuss the results with you. It usually takes a couple of weeks for the results to become available.

Contacting the team

If you have any further questions about your procedure or an existing appointment, please contact the radiology department (**Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm**) at **01279 82 7179**
Press option 1 for radiology appointments, then option 4

If you have any queries **outside of working hours (after 4pm and on weekends)**, you will be redirected to the main radiology reception.

Please note appointment bookings cannot be made during this time.

Your feedback matters

If you would like to give feedback on your care, please contact our patient experience team at paht.pals@nhs.net or **01279 827211**.

Please contact the communications team at paht.communications@nhs.net if you would like this leaflet in another language or format.