

Radiology Department

Barium Meal Examination

Information for patients



Barium meal examination

The X-ray department has received a request for you to have a barium meal 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 which will tell you where to go for your appointment.

- 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 barium meal examination?

This is an X-ray examination of your stomach. The purpose of the examination is to try to find out what may be causing your symptoms (e.g. looking for stomach ulcers which give you pain).

We will ask you to drink a chalky white liquid called barium, which shows up on the X-rays and allows us to see pictures of your stomach.

The doctor doing the test will give you some bicarbonate powder to swallow. This will go fizzy in your stomach and make some gas – which expands the stomach and helps us to get clearer pictures. The doctor will also give you an injection, called Buscopan, to relax the stomach muscles.

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 3-4 months.
- Very rarely, a little bit of the barium liquid goes down the wrong way, into the airway. Sometimes we may need to organise some physiotherapy to help you cough this back up.
- 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.

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 stomach.

How to prepare for the examination

In order for the doctor to see your stomach clearly, it needs to be empty. **Please stop taking white or pink stomach medicine (which coats the stomach wall, e.g. Gaviscon) three days before the X-ray.** 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 have as soon as your examination is completed.

What happens during the examination?

The procedure usually lasts about 20 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.

We usually give you an injection to relax your stomach and then ask you to swallow the fizzy powder which creates gas in your stomach. This will make you want to burp. We will then ask you to drink the white liquid barium.

You will then lie down on a couch while x-ray pictures are taken. We ask you to roll around into lots of different positions quite quickly so that we can take pictures. You may find this quite hard work.

Side effects and what happens after the examination

- **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 and can give you constipation. 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 in doubt or you find you become breathless or your legs swell up, contact your GP.

- The injection we give you may blur your eyesight over the next hour or so. **Do not drive or operate dangerous machinery until you are sure your eyesight is back to normal.**
- Very rarely, in people who were 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 stomach will be examined by the radiologist, who will then send a report of the results to the doctor 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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