Barium Meal
Radiology Service

Information for Patients

What is a Barium Meal?
A barium meal is a procedure performed under x-ray guidance to identify problems of the upper digestive tract including:

- Ulcers in the digestive tract
- Narrowing of the digestive tract
- Impaired movement in the digestive tract
- Gastro-oesophageal reflux
- Unusual digestive tract anatomy (e.g. hiatus hernia).

Barium is a fluid that is visible on x-ray images. Multiple x-rays and real-time video (fluoroscopy) are taken with you in various positions (standing and lying) to allow for adequate distribution of the barium and to optimise viewing of the digestive tract.

What to Bring:
Bring any relevant imaging scans (film packet or a CD containing X-rays, CT scans, ultrasound or MRIs etc.).

Preparation:
Antacid liquids such as Mylanta or Gaviscon should be avoided for several days before the test. This improves the accuracy of the study.

A medication called Buscopan may be given during this scan. This medication helps relax the digestive tract muscles. Please inform our staff if you have glaucoma as the use of Buscopan is not appropriate in patients with glaucoma and an alternative medication can be administered.

Eating/drinking:
You will be required not to eat, drink or take any oral medication for 4 hours prior to your procedure.

Medications:
Please bring a list of all your medications with you to your appointment.

Procedure:
On arrival to the radiology department our staff will discuss with you your medical history and a small plastic tube (cannula) may be inserted into a vein in your hand or arm if Buscopan is required.
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The doctor will explain the procedure to you and you will have an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

During the procedure you will be given the barium to drink while lying on your side to ensure the barium does not move around the digestive tract too quickly. The radiographer or radiologist will provide further instructions on how to position yourself during the study. The fluoroscope (x-ray machine) will move about you but will not come in direct contact with you.

Post Procedure Care:
Maintaining good fluid intake for the first few days after the barium meal is encouraged. This assists in washing the barium out of the bowels and preventing constipation. Bowel motions may appear grey/white in colour until the barium is washed out.

Discharge
You will be able to go home immediately after your procedure if you have no other medical conditions/concerns that require treatment.

You may resume eating and drinking as normal unless otherwise directed.

Results:
The results together with the procedure report will be sent to your referring doctor.

Return to your doctor to discuss examination results.

Radiation Risk
Most medical imaging tests, except MRI and ultrasound, involve exposure to radiation from X-rays. Your doctor considers that the benefits of the examination you require to be greater than the small risk posed by the radiation exposure.

Please advise us at the time of booking and/or at the time of your imaging procedure, if you think you may be pregnant.

Contact information:
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References:
Inside Radiology:
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists®