Barium/Gastrograffin Swallow
Radiology Service

Information for patients

What is a Barium Swallow?
A barium swallow is an investigative scan performed under x-ray guidance to identify problems of the digestive tract such as:
- Structural abnormalities
- Functional abnormalities
- Gastro-oesophageal reflux
- Tumours

Barium is a fluid that is visible on x-ray images. Multiple x-rays and real time video (fluoroscopy) are taken at various angles to allow for both adequate distribution of the contrast and to optimise viewing of the digestive tract. An alternative contrast known as Gastrograffin may be used instead depending on the clinical circumstances.

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 your scan. This improves the accuracy of the scan.

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

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.

The doctor will explain the procedure to you and you will have an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Initial imaging will be taken with you standing upright. You will be asked repeatedly to hold a small amount of barium/gastrograffin in your mouth and only swallow when instructed to. This allows our staff to obtain detailed views of the digestive tract. The radiographer or radiologist will provide further instructions on how to position yourself during the study.
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A ‘siphon test’ or ‘water siphon test’, where you’ll be asked to lie on your right and drink water through a straw may be performed to assess possible gastro-oesophageal reflux.

Post Procedure Care:
Maintaining good fluid intake for the first few days after the barium swallow 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 scan 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:
Radiology – the Alfred
55 Commercial Road, Melbourne VIC 3004
T +613 9076 2000
alfredhealth.org.au

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