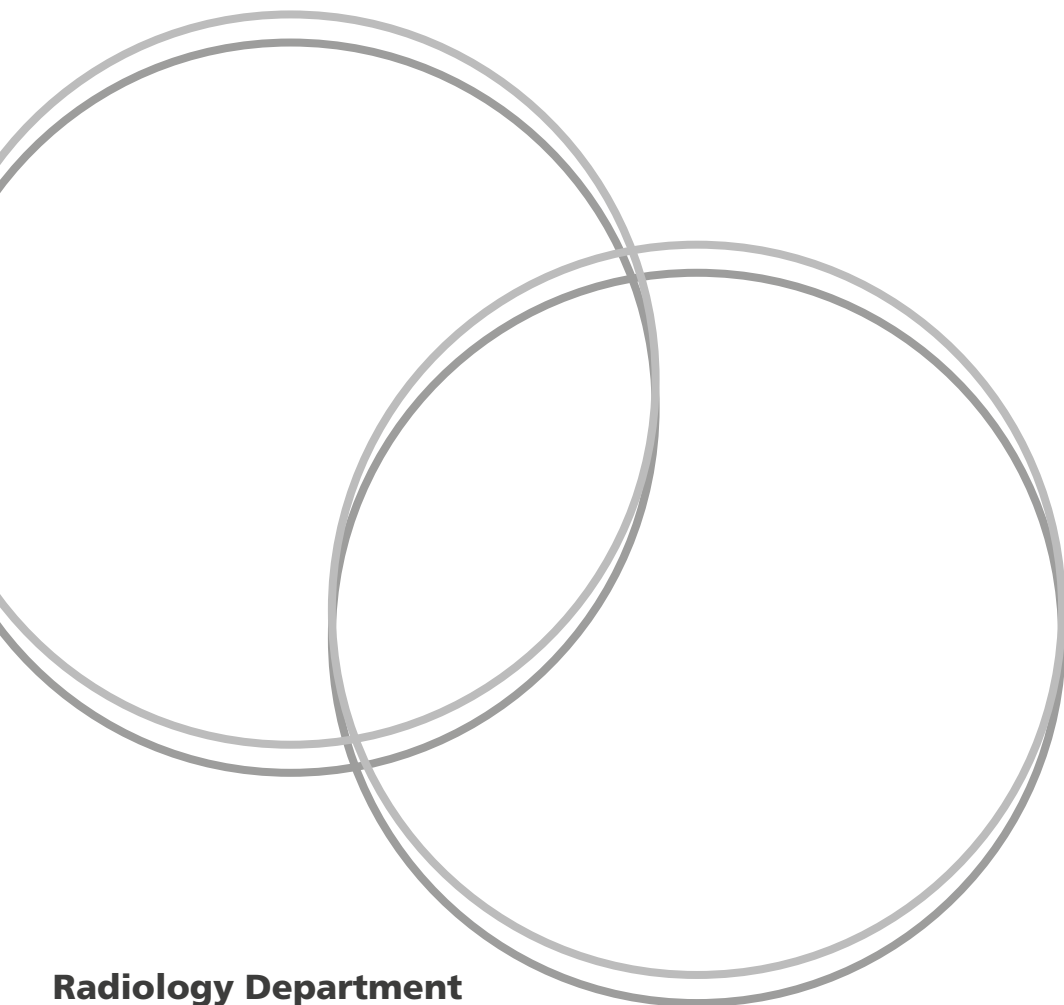




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Barium swallow examination

**Information for patients**



**Radiology Department**

## Barium Swallow examination

The X-ray department has received a request for you to have a Barium Swallow 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**, and feel that you need an earlier in the day appointment, please call the appointments team on your letter to arrange this.
- For people with childbearing capability between the ages of 12 to 55 years it is important to ensure that you are not pregnant. If there is any possibility that you might be pregnant, please let us know immediately.
- If you weigh more than 196kg or 31 stone, please tell us immediately.
- If there is anything you do not understand after reading this leaflet, or anything you wish to discuss further but still wish to come for your appointment, you can speak to the performing radiographer in the room before the examination starts.

**If you need hospital transport to reach the hospital, please arrange this with your GP prior to the appointment.**

## **What is a Barium Swallow examination?**

This is an X-ray examination that looks at your throat, oesophagus and stomach. We will ask you to drink a chalky white liquid called barium, which shows up on the X-rays. We take X-ray pictures as you swallow the barium. The purpose of the test is to try to find out what may be causing your symptoms (e.g. difficulty in swallowing).

## **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 to 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 or we may give you some advice on what to look out for.

Your doctor has recommended this examination because they 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 oesophagus.

## What happens at home before the examination?

In order for the doctor to see your oesophagus clearly, it needs to be empty. **Please stop taking white or pink liquid stomach medicine (which coats the stomach wall, e.g. liquid Gaviscon or milk of magnesia) three days before the X-ray.** All other liquid medication and tablets can be taken as normal up to the night before your appointment (for example: Omeprazole or Lansoprazole).

**Please have no food, drink or tablets for 6 hours before the time of your appointment.** You may have small sips of water up to 2 hours before your appointment, then nothing at all for the last 2 hours. 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, large earrings or bra straps are seen on the pictures.

The radiographer will ask your symptoms and check that you are happy to proceed with the examination.

We will ask you to lie down on an X-ray table, and then drink some liquid barium through a straw while you are in this position. A variety of pictures will be taken in different positions as you are swallowing the liquid. The table will also be moved into the upright position and more pictures will be taken with you drinking barium while you are standing up.

## 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 pale for the next few days and can give you constipation. Therefore, keep drinking extra fluids until your stools return to a normal colour. 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 with water retention, you may not be able to drink this much safely. If in doubt, or if you find you become breathless or your legs swell up, contact your GP.

## **When and how will I know the result of the examination?**

The pictures of your oesophagus will be examined by a radiologist, who will then send a report of the results to the person who referred you.

- If your GP referred you the report is sent to them and you can make an appointment to see them in 7 to 10 days.
- 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](http://www.rcr.ac.uk) (Royal College of Radiologists)

[www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/forpatients/departments/departments.aspx](http://www.oxfordradcliffe.nhs.uk/forpatients/departments/departments.aspx)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**If you are unable to keep your appointment, please help us by contacting the Radiology appointments team as soon as possible. Your appointment slot can then be given to someone else, and you will be offered an alternative date and time.**

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



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