

Department of radiology

# Information about your barium meal examination

The purpose of a **barium meal** is to examine your stomach. To see the stomach clearly, it is very important that it is empty. **It is important to follow the enclosed instructions carefully.** This leaflet explains what happens when you come for your barium meal.

If you have any problems or questions about this appointment or if you are a diabetic, please phone the radiology department on the number below:

Tel: 0161 918 2346

Please come to the integrated procedures unit (IPU) (department 2) for this examination.

## Questions that you may have

### What is the benefit of a barium meal?

This is a diagnostic test that will give the doctors more information about your condition and help them to decide on a suitable treatment.

### How safe is the examination?

There are small risks associated with the radiation that is used to produce the X-ray images. However, these images give the doctors information that helps in your treatment. We think that the benefits of these X-rays outweigh the risks of exposure to radiation

### Are there any alternatives to barium meal?

There are other tests that can be used, such as insertion of a small fibre optic camera into your stomach via the mouth and oesophagus. This allows the doctor to directly see the lining of your stomach.

### What happens if I decide not to have a barium meal?

If you decide not to have a barium meal then please discuss this with the doctor or nurse who is looking after you.



## **Before your barium swallow or meal**

- Do not eat or drink for the two hours before your appointment time, however, if you need to sip small amounts of water or take your usual medication during this period you may do so.
- We will ask you to undress in a cubicle and give you a cotton gown to wear. If you wish, you can bring your own dressing gown to wear over the cotton gown. You may leave your clothes in the cubicle. Take any valuables with you.
- The examination is usually performed by a specialist radiographer who will take you to the examination room. Sometimes there may also be nursing or other staff present.
- The radiographer will explain the test and you will have the opportunity to ask any questions that you may have.

## **During your barium examination**

- We will ask you to stand in front of the X-ray machine and give you a cup containing a small amount of fruit-flavoured liquid. This is the 'barium'.
- The radiographer will tell you when to drink the liquid and he/she will watch you on the TV screen.
- The radiographer will ask you to move and turn during the examination so that he/she can see your stomach clearly.
- We may ask you to swallow a sherbet-like powder, followed by a lemon flavoured liquid. This will make you feel as though you have had a fizzy drink.
- To prevent your stomach from moving on the x-ray images, we may give you a small injection in your arm. The injection is not always necessary.
- When the radiographer takes the x-ray images, he or she may ask you to hold your breath.
- Some X-ray images will be taken when you are standing and some when you are lying down.
- The examination usually takes about 15 minutes.

## **After your barium examination**

- The radiographer will tell you when you can get dressed and leave and will ensure that you know how and when to obtain your results.
- You can now eat and drink normally. If you are a diabetic you can bring some food to eat immediately after the examination.
- To help get rid of the barium after the examination, drink plenty and, if necessary, take a laxative.
- The radiographer will make a report of your examination and send the results to the doctor who referred you.



If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact [patient.information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@christie.nhs.uk)

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

