Mater Private Network

Patient Information Leaflet

Barium Swallow and Meal

Introduction

The Barium Swallow and Meal are radiological examinations to investigate function and anatomy of the pharynx oesophagus and stomach. The swallow alone focuses on the pharynx and oesophagus, the meal on the oesophagus and stomach. They may be completed together.

Patient Preparation

You may be required to fast for the barium swallow depending on your symptoms.
You will be required to fast from food and drinks for at least six hours prior to a barium meal examination. Female patients please let us know in advance if you are or think you might be pregnant.

During the examination

The examination is carried out in the radiology department by a consultant radiologist. If you are having a barium meal you will be required to swallow some small granules followed by a small drink which will produce a gas in your stomach. You must try not to expel this gas. You will be given a cup of barium liquid to drink which will outline the walls of the pharynx, oesophagus, stomach.

You will be positioned in front of the x-ray unit and the progress of the barium is carefully watched by the radiologist on a television screen.

A series of x-ray pictures of the areas of interest are taken in standing and lying positions, after which the examination is complete.

After the examination

You may eat and drink normally. Please confirm this with the radiographer before leaving the department.

The results of the examination to be sent to your referring doctor.

Occasionally a muscle relaxant (Buscopan) may be administered during the procedure. You should not drive for 30 minutes following Buscopan as it may cause blurring of vision.

Medical radiation: risks v benefits

Medical x-rays give a small dose on top of natural radiation. The amount of radiation received during a diagnostic X-ray procedure is low, resulting in the equivalent of approximately a year's background radiation.
As long as it is clearly necessary to help make the correct diagnosis and treatment decision, the benefits of diagnosis and treatment resulting from the examination should outweigh any small radiation risks.