

# Your child's barium follow-through examination

The aim of this leaflet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about your child having a barium follow-through examination. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to the Evelina London Children's Hospital (ELCH). If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor, radiographer or nurse caring for your child.

## What is a barium follow-through examination?

A barium follow-through examination is a study of your child's stomach and small intestine using barium contrast (a harmless thick, white liquid that can easily be seen on X-rays) while X-ray images are taken.

The procedure is carried out by both a radiologist (a doctor who uses X-rays to diagnose and treat illnesses) and a radiographer (a health professional that produces the images used to diagnose and treat illnesses).

The procedure is called 'fluoroscopic imaging' or 'fluoroscopy' and uses X-rays to view images in real time. When the stomach and small intestine (small bowel) are coated with the barium, the radiologist is able to check how they look and how well they are working.

## Why should my child have a barium follow-through examination?

Fluoroscopy makes it possible to see internal organs in motion, so it can provide information that will help the doctor to make a correct diagnosis or decision about your child's treatment.

## What are the risks?

All x-ray examinations involve exposure to radiation in varying amounts. The length of time and level of exposure to radiation from X-rays in medical examinations is carefully controlled and kept to the minimum level that is possible. The doses that are used in medical X-rays are very low and are thought to be very safe. They are similar in strength to other sources of natural radiation that people are exposed to every day, like radiation from the sun and other stars.

The examination takes place in our children's fluoroscopy room that is designed specifically for children and young people, and offers very low dose radiation imaging.

Barium contrast may cause constipation. Please give your child plenty of clear fluids, preferably water, or do anything else you would normally do to help prevent constipation. Barium contrast may also give your child white stools for a few days following the examination. This is normal and is not anything to worry about.

## Are there any alternatives?

This depends on what your child is being examined for. The team looking after your child will assess which approach is the best option. Each request is also checked by the radiology team to ensure that the most appropriate examination is carried out. If you have any questions please speak to the team who referred your child.

## How can I prepare my child for a barium follow-through?

To ensure good quality images, it is important that your child's stomach is empty for this examination. Therefore we ask that your child is not fed before the appointment for the times stated below.

**Children aged one or over:** Do not eat or drink anything for **two hours** before the appointment.

**Children under one year:** Do not feed for **one hour** before the appointment.

If your child has a favourite bottle or beaker cup you may like to bring it with you.

Metal objects can affect the image, so please avoid dressing your child in clothing with poppers or zips. No other special preparation is required.

Older children may be asked to wear a hospital gown during the exam and to remove jewellery, glasses and any clothing that contains metal.

We have a selection of DVDs to help distract your child during the examination. Or you can bring a favourite toy with you, or they may prefer to watch something on your phone or tablet. There is poor signal in the room and so it's best to download content beforehand.

## Consent – asking for your consent

We want to involve you in all the decisions about your child's care and treatment. You will be asked if you consent to the procedure when you are called into the fluoroscopy room. If you do consent, this verbally confirms that you agree to your child having the examination and that you understand what it involves.

If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you. If you still have any questions or concerns on the day of the barium follow-through, please ask the radiographer and/or the radiologist who is going to perform the examination.

## Who can I expect in the room?

During the examination there will be a radiologist and a radiographer in the room. Sometimes a nurse can also be present, as well as a play specialist, as this may be helpful for your child and the examination being performed.

## What happens before a barium follow-through?

As the imaging involves the use of X-rays, we legally have to ask anyone with child bearing potential over the age of 12 whether there is any chance they could be pregnant. To do this we

will provide a simple question sheet when you book in at the imaging reception. This will be checked by the radiographer carrying out the examination.

Before going into the X-ray room your child may be asked to get changed. The radiographer will advise if this is necessary, will show you to a changing room and provide guidance on what to wear.

## **What happens during a barium follow-through?**

The examination takes place in our children's fluoroscopy room, which is located in the Children's Imaging Department.

As a parent or carer you may be asked by the radiographer to support or hold your child (depending on their age) in a particular position. If this help is needed, you will be asked to wear a lead coat to protect you from the radiation. If there is any chance that you could be pregnant, please let the radiographer know before the examination begins. If you are pregnant, we advise you to bring another family member with you to act as a supporter.

The radiographer and/or radiologist will explain what happens during the procedure. Your child will be given a beaker/bottle/cup with the barium contrast liquid in it. They will be encouraged to drink this liquid while we use X-rays to take pictures as the liquid is passing through their stomach and small intestine.

The contrast liquid given has an unusual taste that some children dislike. We will attempt to disguise the taste with fruit juice or by making a shake using flavoured powder (banana/chocolate/strawberry).

It may take some time for the contrast to pass all the way through the small intestine, so your child may have X-rays at approximately 20 minute intervals to monitor progress. You may both be asked to wait outside, and sometimes go for a short walk, to give the barium drink a chance to make its way through to the small bowel. We will bring you back into the room at different times to take pictures. When the barium has reached the large bowel, the radiologist will take some extra pictures and may need to press gently on your child's tummy to get better views.

## **Will my child feel any pain?**

This examination should not be painful.

## **What happens after the procedure?**

You and your child will be able to leave the department after the examination. Your child can eat and drink normally.

## **What do I need to do after I go home?**

Following the procedure, you can continue with child's usual diet. As mentioned above, please give your child plenty of fluids, preferably water, and anything else you would normally give to prevent them from becoming constipated.

## **Will I have a follow-up appointment?**

Your child should already have an appointment with the team who referred them. If not, please contact them to arrange an appointment to discuss the results of this test.

## Contact us

Contact the Children's Imaging Department if you have any questions, **phone:** 020 7188 9218, or visit our website, **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk) or [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk)

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 3003 10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday      **e:** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)  
**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

## Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

**t:** 020 7188 8815      **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

## NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 111

## NHS website

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

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

## Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

**t:** 0800 731 0319      **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)      **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

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