

Your child's barium swallow/meal examination

The aim of this leaflet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about your child having a barium swallow or meal 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 further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor, radiographer or nurse caring for your child.

What is a barium swallow/meal examination?

A barium swallow/meal examination is a study of your child's upper gastrointestinal tract including their oesophagus (food pipe) and stomach. The examination uses barium contrast (a harmless thick, white liquid that is easy to see 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 is coated with the barium, the radiologist is able to check how it looks and how well it is working.

Why should my child have a barium swallow/meal 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 strictly 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 which is specifically designed 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 children's imaging 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 swallow/meal?

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.

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 your child.

Who can I expect in the room?

During the examination there will be a radiologist, a radiographer and a nurse in the room.

What happens before the barium swallow/meal examination?

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 the barium swallow/meal examination?

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 in a particular position (depending on their age). 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.

Your child will be asked to lie on our X-ray table. They will then be asked or encouraged (depending on age) to drink from a bottle or a cup containing barium liquid. X-rays are then used to take images of them swallowing the liquid while it passes through their upper gastrointestinal tract. To ensure that all areas under investigation are looked at in detail, your child will be asked or helped to move into different positions to allow the contrast to coat all the areas being examined.

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 does my child need to do after we go home?

Following the procedure, you can continue with your child's usual diet. Please note the contrast may cause constipation, so encourage them to drink plenty of fluids or do anything else you would normally do to prevent constipation, as mentioned above.

Will my child have a follow-up appointment?

You may already have an appointment with the team who referred your child. If not, please do 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 websites, www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk or 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

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.

phone: 020 7188 3003 10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday **email:** letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

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