Your child’s barium swallow/meal examination

This leaflet gives information about your child’s barium swallow / meal. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us on 020 7188 9218.

The aim of this information sheet 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 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 to include their oesophagus (food pipe) and stomach using barium contrast (a harmless thick white liquid that is easy to see on the X-ray) whilst 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 uses a special type of X-ray called fluoroscopic imaging 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.

What are the benefits – why should my child have a barium swallow/meal examination?
Fluoroscopy uses X-rays that make it possible to see your child’s insides and how they are functioning 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 possible amount. 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.

The examination takes place in our children’s fluoroscopy room which is specifically designed for children and young people and offers very low dose imaging.
Barium contrast may cause constipation. Please give your child plenty of clear fluids or 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 is the best option. Each request is also checked by the children’s imaging team to ensure the most appropriate examination is carried out. If you have any questions please speak to the referring team.

**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.

**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.

**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 are legally obligated to ask girls over the age of 12 whether there is any chance they could be pregnant. To do this we will provide a simple question sheet at the time 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 (This depends 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 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 whilst it passes through their upper gastro intestinal tract. To ensure all areas under investigation are looked in detail, your child will be asked or helped to move into different positions to allow the contrast to coat all areas being looked at.

Will my child feel any pain?
This examination should not be painful.

What happens after the procedure?
You will be able to leave the department after the examination with your child who can eat and drink normally.

What do I need to do after I 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 anything else you would normally do to prevent constipation as mentioned above.

Will I have a follow up appointment?
You may already have an appointment with the team who referred them, if not please do contact them to arrange one to discuss the results of this test.

Who can I contact for more information?
If you have any questions or concerns about the x-ray, please contact the ELCH Imaging Department on 020 7188 9218. Alternatively you can visit our websites at www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk or www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk

Useful Contacts

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

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust’s services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

- **t:** 020 7188 8801  
- **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

- **t:** 020 7188 8815  
- **fax:** 020 7188 5953
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.

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

Become a member of your local hospitals, and help shape our future
Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years.

To join, please call 0848 143 4017, email: members@gstt.nhs.uk or visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk