Having a small bowel video capsule endoscopy (VCE)

This leaflet explains more about having a VCE, including the benefits, risks, any alternatives, and what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a VCE?
This is a small (23mm long) disposable capsule, about the size of a large vitamin capsule or the end of your small finger, containing a solution that dissolves any bubbles in the digestive juices. It is swallowed with a glass of water. It contains a camera, light source, battery and transmitter, which work together to take images of your gut. This allows us to view the lining of the small bowel that cannot normally be reached by other endoscopic procedures. The capsule travels naturally through the gastrointestinal tract and is passed in your poo. Usually you will not notice when you pass the capsule and it will flush away in the toilet.

You will also have to wear a data recorder which records what happens when the capsule is inside your body. You will have a belt which has wireless sensors that pass the information into a data recorder box worn with a strap. The recording usually takes about eight hours to complete. Afterwards you will need to return to the hospital with the equipment.

For a successful examination, it is important that the gut is empty. To achieve this you will need to alter your diet and take specific preparations for a few days before your procedure. These are explained in this leaflet.

Please make sure you follow these instructions carefully. If you do not, your bowel may not be clear and your test may have to be repeated.

Why do you need to have a VCE?
The primary reason for capsule endoscopy is to examine the small bowel in your gastrointestinal tract/gut. Your doctor will explain why you are having a VCE as there are many reasons for this investigation including:
- iron deficiency anaemia (lack of iron in the body)
- obscure gastrointestinal bleeding (bleeding from a point not reachable by a traditional endoscope)
- suspected coeliac disease, and inflammatory bowel diseases
- abnormalities such as polyps (small growths), seen on CT or MRI scans.

Are there other options to VCE?
The alternatives are an advanced endoscopic procedure which is invasive and difficult to perform. The main advantages of capsule endoscopy are that it is easy to do, non-invasive and very safe.
What are the risks of VCE?

A VCE is extremely safe and has few risks or complications. These will be discussed with you on the day of your appointment. If you are at more risk because of your medical history, we will do other tests before your capsule appointment. Sometimes it is necessary to swallow a dummy (patency) capsule to test whether the actual capsule can successfully travel through the small bowel. More information will be provided if this is the case.

- Sometimes the bowel is slow and the capsule does not reach the colon within the eight hours. This will show on the video and we will contact you to arrange an X-ray within a few days to see if the capsule is still in the small bowel.
- If the bowel preparation has not worked, or the bowel is not clean enough, the examination images may not be good enough. This may mean a repeat procedure.
- Sometimes, the capsule does not pass naturally and may become stuck in the gut. This may need an endoscope to retrieve the capsule. Very rarely, surgery may be needed to remove the capsule and identify the cause of it getting stuck. The signs of bowel obstruction (caused by the capsule lodging in a narrowing or stricture) are worsening abdominal pain, abdominal cramps and vomiting (being sick). You will be given instructions about what to do in the rare event that this happens.
- If you think you could be pregnant or have an implanted cardiac device (ICD), please let us know as soon as possible as you might need further consultation (this does not include pacemakers).
- If you have diabetes
  - controlled by tablets, take your morning dose but leave out the evening dose.
  - controlled by insulin, take half your usual morning dose before breakfast and monitor your blood sugar more regularly. If your blood sugar level is low during the day, you can drink a non-fizzy energy drink to correct this.
- If you have more questions, please talk to your specialist nurse or doctor.

How can you prepare for your VCE?

Please follow these instructions carefully to help make sure the images are the best quality possible:

1. **Preparation: 7 days before your appointment**
   - Stop taking: iron supplements, buscopan, colofac, mebeverine, imodium, codeine, morphine and loperamide. If you take codeine/morphine and are concerned about being able to stop, please talk to your doctor.

   These drugs affect the gut and **if the instructions are not followed it could affect the procedure and results.** Please seek advice from your GP if needed as you will be taking a strong laxative during the preparation for this test. Full details will be given to you at your telephone assessment and can be posted or collected in the Endoscopy Unit. If you have any questions about the test, you will be able to discuss them at this time.

2. **Preparation: 4 days before your capsule endoscopy**
   - Stop taking any medicines that contain iron, including over-the-counter supplements with ingredients including ‘ferrous’, such as ferrous sulphate, ferrous fumarate, and Syton®, Floradix®.
   - Continue to take all other medicines as usual.
3 Preparation: 3 days before your capsule endoscopy
- Stop taking any medicines that contain codeine.
- Stop taking any medicines that contain loperamide (Imodium).

4 Preparation: 2 days before your capsule endoscopy
- Drink plenty of fluids. Aim for 2 litres (8-10 glasses) each day.

5 Preparation: The day before your capsule endoscopy

Eating and drinking
- You can eat breakfast as usual, but you must have finished eating by 8.30am at the latest.
- After breakfast do not eat any solid food until after your examination. Your usual medications can be taken with water during the day.
- Drink clear fluids only today. This may include water, squash, fizzy drinks, clear strained soup or clear stock.
- **Aim for at least 2 litres (8-10 glasses) in total throughout the day.**
- It is best to avoid alcoholic drinks.
- Take the Moviprep® bowel preparation (laxatives) at 6pm (see below).

Please see below for a guide on what to eat and what to avoid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You can eat/drink:</th>
<th>Don’t eat/drink:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black tea</td>
<td>Red or purple drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black coffee</td>
<td>Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft drinks (including fizzy and energy drinks)</td>
<td>Solid food after 9am breakfast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear soup or stock (no solids in it and not pureed)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bovril or Marmite (only one mug as it’s salty)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear fruit or vegetable juice with no bits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Medicines**

Some medications can affect the quality of the images, by slowing the bowel movement, or by increasing the bowel muscle movement. Iron makes the images darker.

If you need any advice on when to take your medicines, please contact the Pharmacy Medicines Helpline, t: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

Please let us know if you are taking any regular medicines (including over-the-counter, herbal or homeopathic medicines) or if you have allergies to any medicines.

**Laxatives and fibre**

Stop taking any bulk-forming laxatives. These include:
- Isphaghula (for example, Fybogel)
- bran
- methylcellulose (as in Celevac®)
- sterculia (as in Normaco®)
Taking the Moviprep® bowel preparation
Please follow the instructions and time schedules below, and not the instructions on the packet.

Let us know if:
- you cannot drink a large volume of fluid.
- you are restricted on the volume of fluid you are allowed to drink each day.

The solution tastes better if served chilled, so you might want to mix in advance and keep in the fridge.

On the day before the procedure
6pm Empty the Moviprep® sachet A and B into 1 litre of water and stir until dissolved.
Drink this over the course of 60-90 minutes.

Will you need to stay near a toilet once you have started taking the bowel preparation?
Yes. You should expect frequent bowel movements and diarrhoea, starting within three hours of the first dose. Please note that the timings of the bowel preparation medication are designed so that the effects wear off before you are due to leave home and travel to the hospital.

Will you have any side effects?
You may have some bloating or stomach cramps – this is normal.

You can use a barrier cream on your bottom to prevent soreness during your frequent trips to the toilet.

Remember to keep drinking clear fluids so that you do not get dehydrated. As a guide, try to drink about one glass every hour. Signs that you are dehydrated include dizziness, headache and confusion.

Please report any allergic reactions (such as rash, itchiness, or redness) to the preparation to the Endoscopy Unit. In very rare cases you may have a reaction that causes swelling of the face, lips, tongue or throat. If this happens seek medical help at your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) as soon as possible as this is a medical emergency.

If you vomit at any stage after taking the bowel preparation solution, or if you have any concerns regarding this preparation, please telephone the Endoscopy Unit, at St Thomas’ Hospital, t: 020 7188 3221, or Guy’s Hospital, t: 020 7188 1728.
Other information
If you are taking the contraceptive pill it may not be effective once you have taken the bowel preparation, so you must use other precautions (such as condoms) to avoid pregnancy. Please speak to your GP, pharmacist or family planning clinic for more advice on contraception.

On the day of your appointment
- Do not drink after 4am.
- Please be on time. If you are running late please call the hospital on the number below in case the appointment has to be rescheduled.
- You must not eat (including gum, sweets and mints) but can have small sips of water up to 3 hours before your appointment.
- Do not smoke until after your endoscopy. If you think this might be difficult for you, please speak to your GP or nurse for advice.
- Essential medicines can be taken with sips of water only, before 6am. Non-essential medicines can be postponed until you have a snack at lunchtime – full instructions will be given.
- If you have diabetes, please check if you can take your morning medications with the nurse
- Please wear a loose top that buttons up or zips up at the front.

After swallowing the capsule
The video capsule real time viewer will be used to check the pictures sent from the camera in the capsule, to make sure the capsule is recording well before sending you home.

Please follow these instructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 0hr:                          | Capsule swallowed. You can drink only water for 4 hours after swallowing the capsule.  
  Do NOT smoke for the next 12 hours. |
| 2 hours after swallowing      | You can have water to drink but no food.                               |
| 4 hours after swallowing      | You can have a light snack (a small sandwich or small baked potato with filling) but no other food for another four hours. Drink plenty of fluids – milk is allowed from now on too. Do NOT drink alcohol. |
| 8 hours after swallowing      | You can eat, drink, and take your medications as normal, including any usual medications for diabetes. |
| the capsule:                  |                                                                        |
| At the time agreed            | Return the equipment to the Endoscopy Unit Reception                   |

After completing the examination
It will take a few weeks to analyse the data as there are over 100,000 images to examine. If you develop any adverse symptoms such as unexplained nausea (feeling sick), vomiting or abdominal pain, contact the Endoscopy Unit at St Thomas’ Hospital on the contact numbers below.

If you have not passed the capsule, please tell the gastroenterology doctor who will arrange for you to have an abdominal X-ray to check the location of the capsule. You must not have an MRI examination.
Other questions?
Please see our gastroenterology and hepatology webpage for other endoscopy frequently asked questions, w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/gastroenterology-and-hepatology/overview.aspx

Useful sources of information

Contact us
If you need to change or cancel your appointment, please ring, t: 020 7188 8887.

If you have any questions, problems or concerns, please contact the Endoscopy Unit staff for advice, Monday to Saturday, 9am-5pm:
capsule nurse, t: 020 7188 7188, extension 56257 (if line is busy, call the nurse in charge)
nurse in charge, t: 020 7188 7188, extension 54059
St Thomas’ reception desk, t: 020 7188 7188, extension 54046

Out of hours (6pm-8am, and weekends), in an emergency, contact switchboard, t: 020 7188 7188 and ask for the on-call gastroenterology registrar via Rota watch)

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. t: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

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
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints)    e: 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

NHS 111
This service 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     w: www.111.nhs.uk

Leaflet number: 4298 /VER2
Date published: September 2020
Review date: September 2023
© 2020 Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust
A list of sources is available on request

Our values: Put patients first | Take pride in what we do | Respect others | Strive to be the best | Act with integrity