

Having a water-soluble enema

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having a water-soluble enema. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a water-soluble enema?

A water-soluble enema is an examination of your large bowel (colon and rectum). The bowel cannot normally be seen on x-ray images unless it is coated in a clear liquid called contrast. The procedure is done 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 type of x-ray, called fluoroscopic imaging, to view images in real time. This makes it possible to see the bowel moving in your body. When the bowel is coated with the contrast, the radiologist is able to check how it looks and how well it is working.

What happens during a water-soluble enema?

You will be asked to change into a hospital gown. You may also be asked to remove jewellery, dentures, glasses and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the x-ray images.

Please inform the radiologist of any medicines you are taking, severe allergies, recent illnesses or other medical conditions.

You will be brought into the examination room and asked to lie on the x-ray table. After examining your rectum (back passage), the radiologist will insert a small plastic tube. The liquid contrast will flow through this tube into the bowel and coat the walls of the bowel. A series of x-ray images will then be taken.

You may be repositioned often in order to get pictures of the colon from several angles. The x-ray equipment may also move in order to gain the best possible pictures. The radiologist and radiographer will be there with you at all times to help you.

Once the x-ray images have been taken, most of the liquid will be drained away through the tube. The tube will then be removed from your rectum. You will probably want to go to the toilet and pass out the remaining liquid and air. There is a toilet very close to the room for you to do this.

Please allow 30 minutes for the examination to be completed.

Why should I have a water-soluble enema?

Your doctor has referred you for this examination to help make a diagnosis or help with your treatment plan. You may need to have a water-soluble enema to find out more about what is causing your symptoms, or it may be a follow-up examination after having surgery.

What are the risks?

X-rays are of a type of radiation known as ionising radiation. The dose that you get from a medical x-ray is very low and the associated risks are minimal. The radiographer is responsible for making sure that your dose is kept as low as possible and that the benefits of having the examination outweigh any risk.

The liquid contrast that is used contains iodine, which some people are allergic to. If you have had an allergic reaction to x-ray contrast in the past or you have a known allergy to iodine then you must tell your doctor. Alternatively, contact the X-ray Department on 020 7188 5526 (for Guy's Hospital) or 020 7188 5490 (for St Thomas' Hospital).

Female patients

X-rays can be harmful for an unborn baby and should be avoided by women who are or may be pregnant. It is recommended that the examination is performed within 10 days of the first day/onset of your menstrual period. If your appointment is not within this time or if you think you may be pregnant, please contact the X-ray Department.

Are there any alternatives?

There may be alternative imaging available. However, this has been considered to be the most appropriate test for you. If you have any questions please speak to the doctor who referred you or to the radiologist on the day of your examination.

How can I prepare for the examination?

There is no specific preparation for a water-soluble enema examination. Please arrive on time for your appointment to help us give a prompt service to everyone.

Consent – asking for your consent

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and 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.

Will I feel any pain?

You may feel some discomfort when the tube is put into your rectum. It may also feel quite strange as the contrast passes around your large bowel. The air pumped into your bowel can make you feel bloated, a feeling similar to having trapped wind. The examination should not be painful. If you are concerned, please tell the radiologist or radiographer.

What happens after the water-soluble enema?

It is likely that you will want to use the toilet for a time after the examination to pass the contrast and air. There are toilets very close to the examination room. Once you are happy to leave, you are free to do so. Your bowel movements may be loose over the next few hours.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You will be able to leave the department immediately and resume normal activities.

What should I do if I have a problem after I go home?

If you feel unwell following the examination or have any concerns, please contact your GP or the X-ray Department.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

The pictures taken during the examination are carefully studied by the radiologist, who will produce a detailed report. The results will be sent to the doctor who referred you for the test. They will discuss the results with you and any treatment you may need.

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

Useful sources of information

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about having a water-soluble enema, please contact the **X-ray Department**, **t: 020 7188 5490** (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm).

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 to 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

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:** 111.nhs.uk

NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.

w: 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 **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets, or **e:** patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk

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