

Having an X-ray test to look at your swallowing (contrast swallow/meal test)

Department of Radiology

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: April 2025

Next review: April 2028

Leaflet number: 4 Version: 8

Introduction

If you are an outpatient please read your appointment letter carefully to check which hospital your appointment is at. This leaflet tells you about your X-ray test. Please read it carefully as it has important information and instructions.

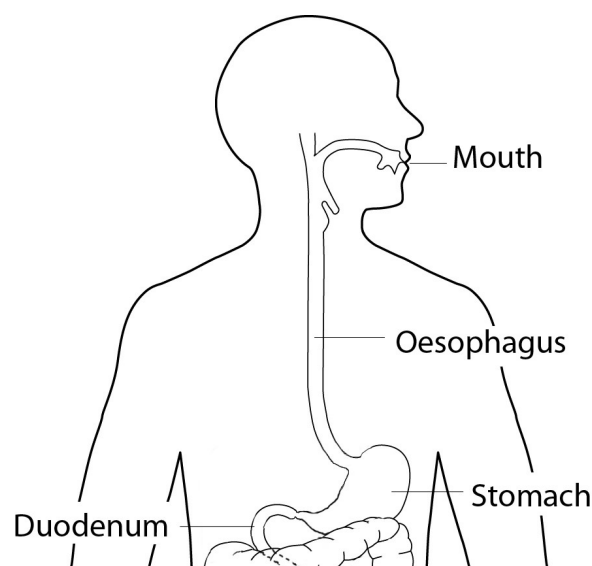
What is a contrast swallow / meal test?

This test is done to look at:

- the tube which connects the mouth and the stomach (oesophagus),
- the lining of the stomach

These parts of the body do not show up very well on ordinary X-ray pictures. We ask you to drink a liquid (contrast) which shows up on X-rays pictures. This makes your oesophagus and stomach show up more clearly on X-ray pictures.

Your doctor will have decided that this is the best test to look for what may be causing your symptoms.



Important information

- **If you need an interpreter, or if you have any special requirements**, please contact the radiology department for more information.
- **Medicines** should be taken as usual unless you have been advised otherwise by the doctor.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Information for patients with diabetes:

If you have diabetes you should have been given a morning appointment. If you have not, please contact the Radiology Department. We may not know that you have diabetes.

Do not take your morning insulin or tablets before the X-ray test.

Please bring the following with you to your X-ray test:

- your own insulin
- any instructions you have for giving your insulin.

You can take all other medicine as usual.

How do I get ready for my X-ray test?

It is important that your stomach is empty when you have this test.

If you have a morning appointment (am):

- Do not eat anything after midnight the night before your X-ray test.
- You can keep having small sips of water after midnight. Do not drink full glasses of water.

If you have an afternoon appointment (pm):

- Do not eat anything after 8am on the day of your X-ray test.
- You can keep having small sips of water after 8am. Do not drink full glasses of water.

Who will be doing the test?

- A doctor who specialises in imaging and X-ray treatments (a radiologist) or a specially trained radiographer will do the test.
- Someone trained to take X-ray pictures (a radiographer or assistant practitioner) will move and control the special X-ray equipment.
- A radiology assistant may be there to help the other staff and care for you.
- As we are a teaching hospital a student may also be in the room. If you do not want this, you can ask that a student is not in the room when you have your test.

How long will the test take?

A contrast swallow and meal test takes between 10 and 20 minutes. The time will vary slightly for each patient.

What happens during the test?

Most patients having this X-ray test will follow this routine below. Sometimes the test may change a little for patients with specific health problems. This may be decided on the day. We will tell you about your test in the X-ray room.

- When you get to the Radiology Department we will direct you to the waiting area.
- We take you to a changing cubicle so you can take off some of your clothes and put on a hospital gown.
- We take you into the X-ray room and talk to you about your test. We then ask you to stand against the X-ray table.
- We give you a small amount of contrast liquid to drink. This may be a white, chalky fluid called barium. Or, it will be a colourless drink called Gastromiro. The contrast liquid shows up on X-rays.
- We take X-ray pictures while you swallow the drink.
- We may ask you to swallow solids. This is usually made from thickened barium drink.
- We may ask you to swallow a 'fizzy' powder and a lemon flavoured drink during your test. Only some patients need to have this. The powder and drink mix together to release air into the stomach. Keep the air in your stomach. Do not let it come up.
- We may give you a small injection of a medicine called Buscopan into a vein in your arm. This helps to relax the muscles of the bowel. It slows down the emptying of your stomach. This helps us to get clearer pictures. Most patients will not need to have this injection. If this is needed we will talk to you about it at the time.
- We may help you to lie down on the X-ray table for part of your test. We may ask you to move into different positions on the X-ray table so that your stomach is coated with a thin layer of the contrast liquid.
- We take X-ray pictures of your stomach while you are standing or lying down.

What happens afterwards?

After the test you can go home. You can eat and drink normally.

What to look out for:

If you had the barium drink:

- Your poo may look white or lighter in colour for a few days.
- Barium can cause constipation. Drinking plenty of fluids and eating foods high in fibre can help prevent you becoming constipated. Do this until the barium leaves your body.

If you had the colourless drink:

- You may have mild diarrhoea for 1 or 2 days. Your poo may be more runny and you may need to rush to the toilet to poo.

What to look out for if you had the Buscopan injection:

- **Eye symptoms:** if you had an injection of Buscopan during the test, the muscles of your eyes may have relaxed as well as the muscles of your bowel. This may cause blurred vision in some patients. Blurred vision lasts for about 30 minutes. **Do not drive until your eyesight returns to normal.**

If you get any pain in your eyes in the next 24 hours (this is rare), please go to your nearest Eye Casualty or Emergency Department (A&E) straight away. Tell the doctor you have had an injection of Buscopan. Show them this leaflet or the aftercare sheet given to you at the end of the test.

- **Dry mouth:** the Buscopan can give you a dry mouth. This will not last long.

How do I get the results?

You will not get the results straight away. After your test we will tell you who the results will go to and how to get your results.

The radiologist or specialist radiographer will look at your X-ray pictures again.

We will send the results to the GP or hospital doctor who wanted you to have this test.

What are the risks from exposure to radiation in this X-ray test?

The main risk from exposure to X-rays is a higher risk of getting a cancer in the future. This risk is thought to be very small. We are all exposed to natural background radiation every day of our lives. This comes from the sun, the food we eat, and the ground. Each test that uses X-rays gives a dose on top of this natural background radiation. The radiation from the X-rays during a swallow/meal X-ray test is equivalent to about 1½ years of natural background radiation.

The benefits of having this test are likely to outweigh any possible risks. The risks of not having the test could be greater. We try to keep your exposure to X-rays as low as possible.

What if I need to talk to someone?

If you have any questions or concerns, or cannot make the appointment:

Please call the Radiology department on **0116 258 8765** and select **option 7**. Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, but not on bank holidays.



اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk