



## Barium Enema examination

Your doctor has referred you for a barium enema. The information in this leaflet is intended to explain what will happen before, during, and after the test and also answer any questions that you may have.

### What is a barium enema?

A barium enema is an X-ray examination of your large bowel. Barium (which is a white chalky liquid) and air will be passed into your bowel through a tube positioned in your back passage. This will allow the lining of the bowel to be seen clearly on X-ray images.

### Before your barium enema

It is important to the success of the test that your bowel is completely empty. For this reason, you will need to follow a special diet and take laxatives on the day before your test. It is important that you follow the instructions on your appointment letter carefully. After you have taken these laxatives, you will experience an extremely urgent need to go to the toilet, although the length of time it takes for this to take effect will vary from person to person.

*If you are pregnant, or think you may be, please inform the medical imaging department as soon as possible (and before taking your bowel preparation) as this test may not be appropriate. If you suffer from diabetes, you must also inform us in advance. You will find our telephone number on your appointment letter.*

### Having your barium enema

There will normally be 2 or 3 members of staff present during the test. They are aware of the embarrassing nature of this test and will do everything they can to make you as comfortable as possible. You will be able to ask any questions that you have before the test begins. During the test you will be asked to lie on the X-ray couch and a small tube will be placed in your back passage. Barium (a white chalky liquid) will be passed into your large bowel through this tube. Following this, you may be given an injection in the arm to relax the bowel. This injection will not put you to sleep or make you feel any different, but will make the examination more comfortable. It may, however, give you blurred vision for up to 30 minutes. After this, air will be passed into your bowel through the tube. This will inflate the bowel and make it easier to see the bowel lining. This may make your bowel 'gurgle' or give you mild wind-like discomfort. While this is happening, a number of X-ray images will be taken. The test normally takes between 20 and 30 minutes.

Immediately following the test, you will be shown to a toilet. You should spend about 10 minutes on the toilet to make sure that as much wind and barium as possible has been passed before you leave the department. You may continue to have loose motions for the rest of the day. A pad will be provided for you to wear in your underwear for the journey home if you wish.

You may continue to pass barium for a number of days after your test. The barium is a completely harmless powder, but, as it is very gritty, you may find that it settles in the bottom of your toilet.

### After your barium enema

Following your barium enema, you may experience some abdominal distension and wind, colicky abdominal pain, or constipation. This is quite normal but can be reduced by:

- returning to eating and drinking normally as soon as possible
- increasing your fluid intake for 2 - 3 days
- making sure your diet contains extra fibre (eg brown bread, fruit, and vegetables) for the next few days.

## Barium Enema examination (continued)

If you develop a red or painful eye, you should seek medical advice immediately (at your local Accident & Emergency Department).

### Results

You will not normally be given the results on the day of the test. A radiologist (a doctor, who is specially trained to interpret X-ray images) will write a report on the findings and these will be sent back to the doctor that referred you. Your doctor should have the results in around 7 - 10 days.

### Are there any risks?

All X-ray examinations involve exposure to ionising radiation in varying amounts. The use of radiation is strictly controlled and is kept to the minimum required. For this examination, the extra radiation is equivalent to what you would receive from the atmosphere (background radiation) over a period of around 2 years.

During the examination, there is a very small risk of making a tiny hole (perforation) in the bowel. This is very rare, but if it happens you may need to stay in hospital to receive antibiotics or have an operation to repair the hole.

It is important to the success of the examination that your bowel is completely 'clean'. You will be sent some strong laxatives to take the day before the test. Please read the instructions and enclosed leaflet carefully. If you have any concerns, please get in touch with us **before** taking these. You will find our telephone number on your appointment letter. Although these laxatives are generally very safe, it is important to follow the instructions carefully.

During the test you may need to have an injection. This is given to prevent your bowel moving. It will not make you sleepy or drowsy. However, it may result in blurred vision for up to 30 minutes. If this happens, you should not drive until your vision has returned to normal. Occasionally patients may develop a red or painful eye. This can happen in patients who have glaucoma, in which case the injection would not normally be given. However, it could arise in patients who have undiagnosed glaucoma. If this happens you should seek medical advice immediately.

As with any procedure unforeseen complications can occur, although this is very rare. Despite these risks it is important to remember that the risk of missing a serious problem by not having the test done could be much greater.

### Commonly asked questions

#### Can I continue to take my tablets before the test?

Yes, providing they do not have to be taken with food. If you do need to take them with food you should contact your GP or pharmacist for advice.

#### Can I bring someone with me?

You are welcome to bring someone with you for company while you are waiting. However, friends and relatives are not allowed into the X-ray room with you. They can stay in the waiting room or help you change if you wish.

#### Can I go back to work after the test?

Your bowels may continue to feel a little unsettled for 24 hours following the test. It may be wise not to return to work until the day after the test.

#### Is the test painful?

You should not feel any pain during the test although you may have some wind-like discomfort, which can continue after the test is finished.

If you have any questions or concerns that are not answered by this leaflet, please contact the Medical Imaging Department on the telephone number given on your appointment letter. We will do our best to make your visit as pleasant as possible.