

## **BARIUM MEAL, SWALLOW, FOLLOW THROUGH**

This leaflet tells you about the procedures (Barium swallow/ meal/ follow through) that look at your oesophagus (gullet or throat), stomach and small intestine. It explains what is involved and the possible risks. It is not meant to replace informed discussion between you and your doctor but can act as a starting point for such a discussion. Please feel free to discuss the examination with your referring doctor (GP or Specialist) or the person carrying out your examination.

### **What is a Barium Swallow/ Meal/ Follow Through?**

The stomach and other parts of the gut do not show up well on ordinary x-rays, so it is necessary to outline them better. This is achieved by coating them with barium, and occasionally filling the stomach with air.

### **Why do I need a Barium Swallow/ Meal/ Follow Through?**

Barium examinations are one of the easiest ways of imaging the upper part of the digestive tract. You may have a variety of symptoms including difficulty in swallowing, pain, weight loss and your doctor has decided to investigate the cause

### **Who has made the decision?**

The doctors in charge of your case, after discussion with you, feel that this may help with the diagnosis.

### **Who will be doing the Barium Swallow/ Meal/ Follow Through?**

A Radiologist will carry out the examination. They will be assisted by either a Radiographer, assistant/student Radiographer or Nurse. The Radiologist will then review the images and issue a report to your referring doctor.

### **Where will the procedure take place?**

The procedure will take place in a 'screening room', within the x-ray department. Please note that due to the nature of the examination we are unable to accommodate unaccompanied children within the department.

### **How do I prepare for a Barium Swallow/ Meal/ Follow Through?**

For the examination to be successful, the stomach and small intestine need to be empty. Therefore you will be asked not to eat or drink for several hours before the examination (usually from 10pm the night before) but full instructions will be included with your appointment letter.

### **What actually happens during a Barium Swallow/ Meal/ Follow Through?**

The Radiologist leading the investigation will introduce themselves and explain the procedure. You will be positioned in front of the screening machine standing on a small step attached to the couch in its upright position. You will be given a cup of barium to drink whilst x-ray images are taken to view your oesophagus. If images of your stomach are required you may be given a small injection into a vein in your arm. You will also be given some granules and lemon juice to drink; this fills your stomach with gas to enable the Radiologist to get better images. If images of your small bowel are required you will be asked to wait in the waiting room while images are taken at intervals.

#### Will it be uncomfortable?

You will feel some minor discomfort from the injection, if you have it. You might feel slight discomfort from your stomach being full of air.

#### How long will it take?

The process should take about 10 – 20 minutes to image your oesophagus or stomach. If images of your small bowel are required you could be in the department for 2 or 3 hours, although it is recommended, however, that you allow at least 1 hour for the examination.

#### Are there any risks or complications?

All x-ray procedures involve exposure to radiation in varying amounts. The duration and level of x-rays are kept to a minimum, but you need to be exposed to x-rays for 2-3 minutes. This equates to that which we receive naturally from the environment over a period of 12 to 18 months.

There is also a small risk from the injection, please tell the radiographer if you have any heart disease or glaucoma. Despite these risks, your doctor will have come to the conclusion that they recommend you should have this examination, and do remember that the risks from missing a serious disorder by not having the examination, are considered to be much greater.