

Contrast Swallow

(Barium Swallow, Water Soluble Contrast, Barium Meal)

Information for patients



What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet will provide you with information about having a Contrast Swallow investigation.

What is a Contrast Swallow?

A Contrast Swallow is an examination of your oesophagus (gullet), the tube between your mouth and stomach. You will be asked to drink a liquid that is visible on X-Ray to see what happens when you swallow.

Why do I need this?

The surgeon, physician or specialist who has referred you has decided that a Contrast Swallow is the best method for diagnosis of your symptoms. This should have been discussed with you.

If you are not sure this is the correct examination for you, you should discuss this with your surgeon, physician or specialist.

Preparation

Please do not eat or drink for four hours before the examination.

If you are on medication for your Diabetes please contact the surgeon, physician or specialist that referred you.

What happens when you arrive for your Contrast Swallow?

When you arrive, please check in at the X-Ray reception desk, staff there will tell you where to sit. You will be called to the procedure room by a member of staff. Once in the room they will discuss the procedure with you. You may need to change into a hospital gown. You may also need to remove any jewellery or metallic clothing around the gullet area (necklaces, neck chains and metal underwire bras, long or hooped earrings may also need to be removed).

The radiologist will ask for verbal consent for the procedure.

About Contrast Swallow

You will be asked to stand on a small platform attached to the X-ray machine.

The procedure will involve taking mouthfuls of the contrast liquid (either a white chalky/strawberry tasting liquid– a bit like a thick milkshake, or a clear aniseed tasting liquid) and to swallow when requested as the x-ray images are taken. You may also be asked to take a fizzy powder with lemon juice, which produces air in the stomach to allow the stomach to be seen clearly. You may be repositioned often, and the platform that you are standing on may move, to allow the best possible pictures to be taken.

The X-Ray platform also tilts so that you are lying down and you may be asked to take a mouthful of the liquid through a straw and swallow when requested, either lying on your back or on your side. You may also be asked to lie on your side or on your stomach at times throughout the examination.

You will be awake throughout the procedure.

How long will I be in hospital/clinic?

The procedure takes about 10 to 20 minutes and you can go home immediately afterwards.

In some cases there may be a delay in taking you for your appointment, especially if staff are dealing with an emergency or an unwell patient. If you have waited for more than 30 minutes after your appointment time, please inform the reception desk.

Immediate aftercare

No specialist aftercare is needed. You may wish to drink plenty of fluids afterwards as some people may find themselves bloated and or constipated following the examination. Your stools may be pale for a few days after the examination – this is normal. If you find that you are constipated you can take normal treatment for that.

Going home

There are no special requirements for going home after this procedure. There is no restriction to driving as long as you feel safe and able to do so.

Follow-up care

The results of this contrast swallow will be sent to the surgeon, physician or specialist that referred you. Your GP will also be sent a copy of the results.

What are the risks of the procedure?

Side effects (complications) are very rare following a Contrast Swallow

- **Aspiration** – There is a very small risk of ‘breathing’ in the barium liquid
- **Constipation/bloating** – Some people may find themselves bloated or constipated following the procedure. Drinking plenty of water and or taking your normal medication usually resolves this.

If you are concerned about whether or not to proceed with the examination, you should discuss this with the surgeon, physician or specialist who referred you.

Back to normal life

You can resume your normal activities immediately after the examination.

Any more questions?

Please contact the surgeon, physician or specialist who referred you.

Cancellation

While we make every effort to avoid this where possible, there is always a risk that your contrast swallow may be cancelled at short notice. This is due to either emergency patients who need urgent treatment or other reasons which are beyond our control. We realise that this can cause distress and inconvenience, but in the event that your contrast swallow is postponed, you will be offered a new date as soon as possible.

Keeping your appointment

If you cannot keep your appointment, or have been given one that is unsuitable, please change it by phoning the number on your appointment letter. Your call will give someone else the chance to be seen and will help us keep waiting times to a minimum.

Public transport and travel information

Bus details are available from:

Lothian Buses on 0131 555 6363 or www.lothianbuses.co.uk

Traveline Scotland on 08712 002 233 or www.travelinescotland.com

Train details are available from:

National Rail Enquiries on 03457 484 950 or www.nationalrail.co.uk

Patient transport

Patient transport will only be made available if you have a medical or clinical need. Telephone 0300 123 1236 (calls charged at local rate) up to 28 days in advance to book, making sure you have your CHI Number available. A text relay service is available if you are hard of hearing or speech impaired. They can be contacted on: 18001-0300 123 1236 (calls charged at local rate). To cancel patient transport, you should telephone 0800 389 1333 (Freephone 24 hour answer service).

Interpretation and translation

Your GP will inform us of any interpreting requirements you have before you come to hospital and we will provide an appropriate interpreter. If you are having this procedure as an existing in-patient, staff will arrange interpreting support for you before your procedure. This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille or your community language.

Supporting positive conversations

NHS Lothian supports person-centred care, and encourages patients to be involved in making decisions about their healthcare. It is important that you have a clear understanding of the care and treatment options available, and the risks and benefits specific to you, before you consent to treatment.

This leaflet contains general information about your care and treatment. If you have any further questions, you are encouraged to discuss these with the healthcare professional who is providing your care.

You may wish to ask:

- What are the benefits to me of receiving this treatment?
- What are the risks to me of receiving this treatment?
- Are there any alternative treatments which might be suitable for me?
- What might happen to me if I decide to do nothing?

