

Barium enema

A barium enema is a double contrast x-ray examination of the large bowel. A white fluid (barium) is introduced into the bowel along with air. The combination of barium and air gives a good outline of the large bowel on the x-ray pictures.

Reasons for having a barium enema.

It will give your doctor more information about your bowel problem to help with a diagnosis.

The alternatives may be a Colonoscopy or CT (Computed Tomography) Pneumocolon depending on the reason for your examination. Please discuss this with your doctor.

Preparation

- For this examination to be successful your bowel must be as empty as possible.
- As part of the preparation you will be given a laxative (medicine to clear the bowel). You will need to stay near a toilet after taking it.
- You will need to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration
- **You must follow these instructions on eating and drinking carefully:**
- **The day BEFORE your examination** 7am – Light breakfast e.g. one slice of bread plus eggs, tea or coffee
- 8am – One sachet of PICOLAX mixed with $\frac{1}{4}$ pint of water. All to be taken at once
- **Nothing solid to eat after breakfast until after the examination the following day**
- **Drink as much fluid as possible during the day**, at least $\frac{1}{4}$ pint every hour (including clear soups)
- 4pm – One sachet of PICOLAX mixed with $\frac{1}{4}$ pint of water. All to be taken at once
- If you have insurance, please ensure that you bring your policy number and have obtained an authorisation number. You will need this when you register

Please let us know in advance if:

- You have Diabetes
- You have any allergies
- You are or might be pregnant

On arrival for your examination

- On arrival at the Imaging department you will be registered and will need to provide an authorisation code from your insurance company or another proof of payment.
- Once registered, you will be given a gown to change into.
- You will meet the radiographer (who takes the x-rays), radiology nurse and radiologist (specialist doctor) who will carry out the examination. They will go through the procedure with you.
- **Please do not hesitate to ask any questions you may have.**
- **Please note** – you may be given an injection to relax the bowel, which often makes the examination more comfortable and more effective. This injection may cause slightly blurred vision; this is temporary, but we advise you **not to drive yourself home.**

The examination

- In the examination room, while you are lying comfortably on a bed on your side, the nurse or a doctor will gently pass a small tube (catheter) into your back passage (rectum) and some white fluid (barium) will be introduced through the tube. The white fluid shows up the bowel on the x-rays.
- The bowel is then distended with air so that the lining of the bowel can be seen more clearly. X-ray pictures are then taken of the large bowel.
- Any air that goes up into the bowel will come back down as wind; this is normal, please do not worry.
- It can be a rather uncomfortable procedure but it is not usually painful.
- Staff are accustomed to doing this procedure and will be supportive.
- You will need to go to the toilet before and after the examination. There is a toilet close by.
- The procedure takes about 45 minutes.

After the examination

- We advise you to arrange for a friend or relative to accompany you home.
- You can go back to your normal diet.
- Your stools will appear white and may be harder (because of the white fluid); this will return to normal within two days or so.
- To avoid constipation after the examination we advise you to **drink plenty of fluids**.
- **The results** will be sent to the doctor who requested the examination usually within 2 working days.

The Risks

This is a very safe procedure; but there is some risk associated with most procedures. For a barium enema the risks include the following:

- There can be a risk of **perforation**, which is a small tear in the bowel; this is very rare.
- There is a risk that the injection to relax the bowel can cause blurred vision; this is temporary and lasts about 20 minutes.
- If you take an oral contraceptive (the pill), it may be made ineffective by taking the laxative preparation. Please continue to take it but also take extra precautions for the rest of the cycle.
- The barium does not get absorbed into the body. Therefore, it is rare for this test to cause any other complications or side effects.

Contact us

If you have anymore questions or need further information please contact us on:

020 7483 5012 or

020 7586 5959 ext 6014/5157

Or contact the Superintendent, Tanille Spencer, on 020 7483 5066