

Information for patients having a **Barium Enema**



Please arrive early to give yourself time to check in. Please bring with you photo identification and your BC Care Card (personal health number).

Do not bring children under the age of 12 with you unless you bring someone to care for them while you are having the test.

Our staff will speak with you in English. If you are not fluent in English, please bring an adult interpreter with you who is able to stay for the entire test.

If you are not able to keep your appointment, please call the department right away. By giving us at least 24 hours notice we are able to use your time slot for another patient. We will try to give you another date and time for your test when you call.

Please do not wear perfume, cologne, or aftershave to your appointment. Some people are allergic to fragrance ingredients and can suffer severe reactions.

This brochure tells you about having a barium enema. It explains what is involved and what the possible risks are. It is not meant to replace informed discussion between you and your doctor, but can act as a starting point for such a discussion.

The radiology department

Radiologists are doctors specially trained to interpret the images and carry out more complex examinations. They are supported by Technologists (radiographers) who are highly trained to carry out x-rays and other imaging procedures.

What is a Barium Enema?

A Barium Enema is a special x-ray study of the large bowel (colon and rectum). Barium is used as a contrast medium to outline the bowel. During the examination, air can be put into the bowel to inflate it, and this helps it to show up more clearly. Both the barium and the air need to be passed into the bowel through a small, soft tube, which is inserted into the rectum. The procedure is frequently performed to help diagnose such symptoms as:

- Chronic diarrhea
- Blood in stools
- Constipation
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Unexplained weight loss
- A change in bowel habits

Are there any risks?

There is a slight risk if you are given an injection of a medication to relax the bowel, and make the examination more comfortable. The radiologist or technologist will ask you if you have any history of heart disease or glaucoma (eye disease caused by pressure within the eye) before giving this injection.



Are you required to make any special preparations?

Yes, it is essential that your bowel should be empty.

Contact the medical imaging department for bowel preparation instructions. At your local pharmacy, purchase a bowel preparation kit for a barium enema examination. It will explain what you should eat/ drink and how you need to take the special laxative (medication to help empty the bowel). The pharmacist can answer any questions about the bowel preparation you may have.

If you are diabetic

If you do take insulin or tablets you need to make sure you discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist on specific diet/ eating instructions to prevent low blood sugar.

If you are pregnant

This examination is not advisable for pregnant women, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Please advise the radiologist or technologist if you think you are, or might be, pregnant.

Can you bring a relative/friend?

Only in special circumstances will they be permitted to accompany you into the actual x-ray room. Children under 12 years are not allowed to accompany you in the room, nor are they permitted to wait unattended in the waiting room. Hospital staff are not responsible for your child while you have your x-ray.

Upon arrival

The Technologist will explain the procedure for your examination and show you to a private change room where you may remove your clothing, jewellery and watches etc. You will also be asked to put on a hospital gown. You will be asked to place your clothes and personal items in a garment bag or a basket, which you keep with you.

If you are pregnant or believe you might be, please inform the technologist or radiologist prior to the examination.

Who will you see?

You will be cared for by a small team including a Technologist, and a Radiologist. Whoever is doing the examination will be watching a TV screen at the time. Later, a radiologist will review the x-ray images and issue a report.

What happens during the barium enema investigation?

You will be taken into the special fluoroscopic x-ray room and asked to lie down on the x-ray table, on your left side at first. The radiologist or technologist will insert the soft plastic tube into your rectum and the barium liquid then flows through the tube and into your bowel.

The radiologist or technologist watches this “live” on the TV screen and moves you into different positions, both to help the barium flow and to see all parts of the bowel.

Once sufficient barium is in the bowel, air is also introduced through the same tube; this expands the bowel further, to make the colon detail more clear.

At this point, several x-rays will be taken with you in different positions, some with you standing up, and some with you lying on your side.

You may be given an injection of medication to relax the muscles of the bowel wall and make the examination easier. Some radiologists will give this routinely at the start of the procedure, unless you have a history of heart disease or glaucoma. Other radiologists may not give it unless they see a lot of bowel spasm or cramps on the TV screen. This injection may cause some blurring of vision, and you would be advised not to drive for an hour or so afterwards.

Once the technologist or radiologist is satisfied that sufficient x-rays have been taken of the large bowel, the tube will be removed, and you will be allowed to leave the x-ray room and go to the toilet. Afterwards, you may require a further plain, ordinary x-ray of your abdomen.

Will it be uncomfortable?

This examination should not hurt, although occasionally a patient may feel a cramp-like pain persist for a while afterwards. However, during the examination, you might feel the slight discomfort associated with the bowel becoming full.

Some patients are worried about being unable to hold on to the barium. It is obviously important to try and hold on to the barium and air by keeping the muscles of your bottom very tight. However, it is accepted that this can sometimes happen so try not to worry too much about this.

How long will it take?

The whole process of taking images will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Are there any side-effects?

You will want to visit the toilet immediately after the procedure. As barium can be constipating, patients are encouraged to drink water after the procedure to clear barium from the bowel. Throughout the day please drink up to 8 glasses of water as tolerated.

When will you get the results?

The images will be examined after your visit and a written report on the finding and sent to your referring doctor, which is normally available in 14 days.

Important Notice

If you should have any questions or concerns about the information in this brochure, please feel free to ask the medical staff involved. This brochure is for general information only and is not a substitute for talking to your health-care provider.

Other sources of information

Websites

For general information about radiology departments, visit:

The radiology information resource for patients website:
www.radiologyinfo.org

The Royal College of Radiologists' website:
www.goingfora.com

Hours of Operation:

Monday:

Tuesday:

Wednesday:

Thursday:

Friday:

Saturday:

Sunday:

Contact Numbers:

Patient's Name: _____

Appointment Date: _____

Appointment Time: _____

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http://www.rcr.ac.uk/docs/patients/worddocs/CRPLG_19.doc

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