

Modified Barium Swallow (MBS) Study

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What is a modified barium swallow (MBS) study?

An MBS is a video x-ray of your swallowing function. Sometimes, it is also referred to as a videofluoroscopic swallowing study (VFSS). A speech-language pathologist (SLP) and a radiologist will be present during the study. A nurse, an occupational therapist, a dietitian, or a respiratory therapist may also be present. You will be asked to swallow foods and liquids mixed with barium. The radiologist will take an x-ray video of your swallow.

When is it recommended?

An MBS is recommended when swallowing difficulties are suspected. If you have difficulty swallowing, you may be at risk for food and/or liquids entering your lungs. This may lead to an infection in your lungs known as aspiration pneumonia. You may also be at risk of not eating and drinking enough to maintain dietary requirements. This could lead to dehydration or malnutrition.

What is barium?

Barium is a white mineral that can be seen on x-ray. It has a chalky taste and comes in liquid or paste form. It is mixed with liquids and/or food so they can be seen more clearly during the study.

What happens during the test?

You will be seated beside or in front of the x-ray machine. You will be given food and liquid mixed with barium to swallow. The SLP and the radiologist will assess the safety and efficiency of your swallow, whether food or liquids enter the airway, and which swallowing techniques work best for you. As part of the study, you will be provided with a variety of food textures as well as thin and thickened liquid to determine which are easiest and safest for you to swallow.

What are the risks?

As with all x-rays there is a small exposure to radiation. This exposure is not harmful. To avoid constipation, it is recommended to have extra fluids after the MBS as directed by your SLP, doctor, or nurse.

How do I prepare for the MBS?

Notify the team of any food allergies you may have. Make sure to bring your dentures and anything that helps you see, hear, or communicate (e.g. eyeglasses, hearing aids etc.) to the MBS.

What happens after the test?

The results will be reviewed with you, your doctor, and your team. Recommendations may include different strategies, positions, food textures, and thickened liquids. Therapy may also be recommended to improve the safety and/or efficiency of your swallow. In some circumstances an alternative method of feeding may be considered.