

About Your Modified Barium Swallow

What You Need to Know and Do

A modified barium swallow is also called a video fluoroscopic swallowing exam. This test checks your ability to swallow different textures of fluids and solid materials.

During the test, you will swallow a substance (barium) that is mixed with a variety of materials. Barium lets doctors see parts of your body involved with swallowing (tongue, mouth, throat, and esophagus) clearly on X-rays.

The test is given if you:

- have problems swallowing
- are at risk of choking
- are at risk of having food or drink go into the lungs (aspiration)
- have a feeding tube and the doctor wants to check it see if you can go back to eating by mouth.

What should I do before my appointment?

Be sure to tell the radiologist or technologist if you:

- are taking any medicines
- had recent X-rays or tests involving barium
- had recent surgery
- have other health problems, especially those affecting the lungs
- have any allergies
- are or may be pregnant

When should I arrive for my appointment?

You will need to arrive at least 30 minutes before your appointment time to check in and complete paperwork.

What happens during my test?

You will sit in a special chair next to an X-ray table.

You will get tiny amounts of various food and liquids of different textures to swallow.

You may get thin liquids (such as water) or thick liquids (such as milk). You may also get soft foods (such as pudding). The food and liquids will contain a small amount of barium.

An X-ray video will be taken as each food or liquid is swallowed.

A speech pathologist, feeding specialist, or other health care providers will watch you swallow each food or liquid.

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What happens after my test?

Barium can make you constipated. Drinking water may help to prevent constipation.

Your stool will look chalky white or light for 1 to 2 days. This is a sign the barium is leaving your body.

Call your doctor if:

- you have severe constipation
- you do not have signs of the barium (white or light stools) within 24 hours of the test.

Your test results will be provided to your doctor. Your doctor will talk to you about the results.

You will be advised about what foods and liquids are safe for you.