

Patient information factsheet

Having a small bowel follow through examination

This factsheet will give you information about having a small bowel follow through examination. We hope it will answer some of the questions you may have but, if there is anything you do not understand, a member of your healthcare team will be happy to explain further.

What is a small bowel follow through examination?

A small bowel follow through is an examination of your small bowel using a liquid that is visible on x-ray, called barium. You will be asked to drink barium and x-rays will then be taken to examine your small bowel.

The procedure will take place in the radiology department and usually takes one to three hours.

Preparation for the procedure

You will need to start the preparation for the test the day before.

You will be asked to follow a certain diet on the day before and to stop eating and drinking for six hours before the examination. These instructions will be provided with your appointment. Please follow them carefully.

If you are on medication for diabetes, please contact your diabetic nurse for specific instructions. If needed, it may be possible to change your appointment time to suit you.

If you are female and of childbearing capacity, you will be asked to complete a form with the date of your last period and whether there is any possibility you may be pregnant. This is because this examination should only be performed when we can be sure you are not pregnant.

Please let us know as soon as possible if you have problems standing or transferring from a wheelchair so we can make arrangements.

You should also let us know if you have had any previous reactions to iodine or x-ray contrast (a liquid that is visible on x-ray). Our telephone number is over the page.

What to bring with you

You might want to bring your own dressing gown, slippers and reading material.

During the procedure

You will be asked to change into a hospital gown before being taken to the examination room.

A radiologist (a doctor who uses x-rays to diagnose illnesses) will give you dilute barium to drink.

X-rays will be taken at intervals so all of your small bowel can be examined.

The radiologist may ask to press on your abdomen at some points during the examination so that certain segments of bowel can be seen better.

When the barium has reached your large bowel (colon), the examination is complete. The barium takes a variable amount of time to pass through the small bowel. The test can be completed in one hour but can take up to three hours and sometimes longer.

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After the procedure

You can resume your normal diet and should drink plenty of fluids.

Your bowel motions may be light coloured and frequent for the next few days. You may wish to remain near a toilet immediately after the test.

You may resume your medications.

Risks

There is some exposure to radiation during the procedure because x-rays are used. However, as this is a low dose examination, exposure to radiation is kept to a minimum. Generally, the amount of radiation you are exposed to during this procedure is equivalent to between a few days and a few years of exposure to natural radiation from the environment.

Results

The radiologist will examine the pictures and a report of the findings will be sent to the doctor who requested the procedure. This report should be available at your outpatient follow up appointment.

Further information

Some of your questions should have been answered in this factsheet but remember that this is only a starting point for discussion about your treatment with the doctors looking after you.

It is important that you are satisfied that you have received enough information about the procedure. If you have any questions before or after the examination please telephone the radiology department on 023 8120 4870 from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Useful links

NHS Choices www.nhs.uk

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.