

Patient information factsheet

Having a sialogram

We have given you this factsheet because you have an appointment for a sialogram. It explains what a sialogram is, what to expect at your appointment and what the possible risks are. We hope it will answer some of the questions you may have. If there is anything you don't understand, a member of your healthcare team will be happy to explain further.

What is a sialogram?

A sialogram is a test which uses x-rays and a contrast medium (x-ray dye) to produce detailed images of the salivary glands (parotid or submandibular glands). These glands drain saliva into your mouth through small tubes called ducts. The duct openings are located in your cheeks and under your tongue. The ducts are not easy to see on ordinary x-ray images, so we use a contrast medium to see them more clearly on the images.

Why do I need a sialogram?

You may need a sialogram if your salivary glands are swollen or painful, as they may be blocked or infected. A sialogram will help us to check for any blockages in your salivary glands and help us to plan the best treatment for you.

How should I prepare for the test?

Recent infection

If you have had an infection involving your salivary gland within six weeks of your appointment, please let us know before the test. We may need to postpone your test until the infection has completely gone.

Pregnancy

Please let us know before the test if you are or think you may be pregnant. This test uses radiation, so there is a risk to your unborn baby. For safety reasons, we will need to postpone this test until after you give birth.

Allergy to iodine or contrast medium

Please let us know before the test if you have a known allergy to iodine or intravenous contrast medium (x-ray dye).

Eating and drinking

You may eat and drink normally before the test.

Medications

You should continue to take all your normal medications.

Jewellery

Please remove necklaces, earrings and nose studs before you come to your appointment.

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Transport

If you need transport to your appointment, please contact your GP to arrange it for you.

On the day of your appointment

Please try to arrive 15 minutes before your appointment. If you are late, we may be unable to proceed with the test.

If you are unable to attend your appointment, please let us know as soon as possible.

If you are arriving by car, please remember that our car parks can get very busy, so it's a good idea to allow plenty of time to find a space. You may wish to consider getting a lift or coming by public transport.

Who will be performing the test?

The test will be performed by a radiologist (a doctor who uses x-rays to diagnose illnesses).

What will happen during the test?

We will explain the test to you to make sure you fully understand the procedure before asking you for your consent to proceed.

We will then ask you to lie on an examination table flat on your back. To allow us to take images of your problematic salivary gland from different angles, the examination table and x-ray equipment will move around you, but it will not touch you.

We will ask you to open your mouth wide to allow us to identify the duct opening of the problematic gland. This part of the test can take a little time, but it will not be painful. To help us find the duct opening, we may give you some lemon juice, as this will open your salivary ducts. Once we have located the duct opening, we will insert a catheter (a thin, plastic tube).

When the catheter is in place, we will inject a small amount of contrast medium through it to fill the gland. We will then remove the catheter and take images of the gland in a range of positions. At the end of the test, we will give you some more lemon juice to drink. This will encourage your gland to drain the contrast medium into your mouth. This will taste bitter, but there are no harmful side effects from swallowing it. Once your gland is empty, we will take a final image.

How long will the test take?

The test usually takes 30 minutes, but you may be at the radiology department for an hour in total.

What will happen after the test?

You will be able to go home or return to work and resume normal activities immediately after the test.

Please drink plenty of fluids after the test to keep yourself hydrated and massage the gland that has been examined to ensure it drains wells. This will also reduce your chance of developing an infection.

Will the test be painful?

You may experience some mild pressure in your salivary gland when the contrast medium is injected and a slight swelling after the test. This may be a little uncomfortable, but not painful. You will not need to have any anaesthetic (medications used during tests and surgical operations to numb sensation in certain areas of the body or induce sleep).

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Are there any risks or side effects?

As with any medical procedure, there are some possible risks and side effects. These include:

Infection

It is common for your gland to feel slightly swollen and/or uncomfortable after the test. Staying well hydrated and massaging the gland after the test will help to reduce the swelling. If, after a few days, the swelling does not settle or becomes worse, you may have developed an infection in your gland. This is rare, but if it happens, contact your GP, as you may require antibiotics.

Allergic reaction to the contrast medium

The contrast medium we use for this test can cause an allergic reaction in some people.

Common symptoms of an allergic reaction include:

- a headache
- nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick)
- sneezing, wheezing or a runny nose
- eye irritation
- itching, hives or a skin rash
- swelling of the face, mouth, hands, feet or throat
- breathing difficulties
- low blood pressure

Before we give you the contrast medium, we will go through a checklist with you to identify any health conditions which may increase your risk of having an allergic reaction. However, it is still possible to have an allergic reaction to the contrast medium without having an underlying health condition.

If you do have an allergic reaction, it will normally happen straightaway. If this happens, we will give you the appropriate treatment in the radiology department. Occasionally, some people may develop a red, itchy rash a few hours after the test. This is very rare, but if it does happen, you should contact your GP or local emergency department immediately for advice.

Other delayed reactions include:

- nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick)
- diarrhoea
- abdominal pain
- dizziness
- a headache

These symptoms are rare and usually disappear within a few hours without treatment. However, if you have any concerns about your symptoms, contact your GP or nearest emergency department for advice.

Exposure to radiation

All x-ray procedures involve exposure to varying amounts of radiation. Radiation increases your risk of cancer, but for this test, the risk has been assessed as low. We will not expose you to any more radiation than is necessary. We consider that the benefit to you from the test outweighs the low risk from the radiation.

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Can I bring a relative or friend?

You may bring a relative or friend with you to your appointment. However, for safety reasons, they will need to wait in the waiting area and will only be permitted into the examination room under special circumstances.

Children must always be accompanied and supervised by a responsible adult.

When will I receive my results?

A radiologist will examine the images and write up a report. We will then send this report to the doctor who referred you for the test (usually within 14 working days). They will then invite you in for an appointment to discuss your results.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns before the test, please contact us.

Radiology department

Telephone: **023 8120 6079** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

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