IMAGING: BARIUM TESTS

Barium Swallow

A barium swallow is performed to assess frequent heartburn (pain), gastric reflux (food/acid coming back up), aspiration (food and/or fluid in the windpipe) and difficulty eating, drinking or swallowing.

What to expect

- Before the exam:
  The patient may not eat or drink from midnight before the exam.

- During the exam:
  For the first portion of the test, the patient stands upright and drinks a cup of barium. Using a fluoroscope (X-ray unit combined with a television screen), the radiologist watches the flow of liquid as it moves from the mouth to the stomach, while the patient slowly turns in different positions.
  For the second portion of the procedure, the patient lies facedown on the exam table and drinks more barium. The radiologist takes additional pictures, and the technologist takes an additional series of standard X-rays. The entire procedure takes approximately 60 minutes.

- After the exam:
  The patient must drink plenty of liquids for 24 to 48 hours. The barium may make a patient’s stool white for several days. If constipation occurs, the doctor may recommend a mild laxative.

Barium Enema

This exam assesses a change in bowel habits, abdominal pain or rectal bleeding and suspected diverticulitis (small inflamed areas in the colon) or polyps (growth of tissue on the colon).

What to expect

- Before the exam:
  For a satisfactory exam, the colon must be empty. The patient must follow a restricted diet, take a laxative the night before the exam and refrain from eating and drinking from midnight the day of the exam. On the morning of the procedure, the patient is given a final cleansing with a Fleet enema.

- During the exam:
  For the procedure, the patient lies on an exam table. The technologist takes an initial film to make sure the intestines are clean. Once the film has been reviewed by the radiologist, the technologist inserts a lubricated enema tip into the rectum and allows the liquid barium to flow through the enema tip a little at a time. Barium allows viewing of the colon. The radiologist watches the flow of the barium with a fluoroscope (X-ray unit combined with a television screen). The patient is asked to turn from side to side as the pictures are being taken to help coat the walls of the colon. The technologist takes a series of

(Continued on reverse)
X-ray pictures of the colon. The patient must try not to expel the barium and must remain very still as pictures are being taken. The exam takes approximately 45 minutes.

After the exam:
The patient must drink plenty of liquids for 24 to 48 hours. The barium may make a patient’s stool white for several days. If constipation occurs, the doctor may recommend a mild laxative.

**Barium Enema with Air Contrast**

Before the exam:
For a satisfactory exam, the colon must be empty. The patient must follow a restricted diet, take a laxative the night before the exam and refrain from eating and drinking from midnight the day of the exam. On the morning of the procedure, the patient is given a final cleansing with a Fleet enema.

During the exam:
For the procedure, the patient lies on an exam table, while the technologist takes an initial film to make sure the intestines are clean. Once the film has been reviewed by the radiologist, the technologist inserts a lubricated enema tip into the rectum and allows the liquid barium to flow through the enema tip a little at a time. Barium allows viewing of the colon. The radiologist watches the flow of the barium with a fluoroscope (X-ray unit combined with a television screen). The patient is asked to turn from side to side as the pictures are being taken to help coat the walls of the colon. The radiologist then introduces air into the colon through the same enema tip, which may cause cramping or a bloating sensation. The air is used to expand the walls of the colon for a more detailed look at the lining. The technologist takes a series of X-rays of the colon. The patient must try not to expel the air or the barium and must remain very still as pictures are being taken. The exam takes approximately 45 minutes.

After the exam:
The patient must drink plenty of liquids for 24 to 48 hours. The barium may make a patient’s stool white for several days. If constipation occurs, the doctor may recommend a mild laxative.