Barium swallow/meal

What is a Barium swallow/meal?

A Barium swallow is an x-ray examination of the oesophagus and a Barium meal is an x-ray examination of the stomach and duodenum (1st part of the small bowel). Frequently, a Barium swallow and meal are performed together. For these examinations, the patient is required to drink a liquid dye called Barium.

How do I prepare for this examination?

You must not eat or drink anything, from midnight the night before the examination. This is very important because if your stomach or bowel is not empty, the study will not be satisfactory and may have to be postponed.

Can I take my usual medication?

Yes, however, diabetics who are fasting are advised to alter their insulin intake appropriately.

What will happen during the examination?

A radiologist, radiographer and x-ray attendant will be present in the x-ray room. For a Barium meal examination, you will be asked to swallow granules in a fizzy liquid to produce gas in your stomach. You will then be asked to stand behind the x-ray machine and you will be given a white liquid (Barium) to drink. This drink outlines the oesophagus, stomach and bowel, the radiologist will watch this on a special x-ray television screen. For a Barium meal examination, you will have to lie flat halfway through the test. Periodically, the radiologist will ask you to change your position or hold your breath so that "snapshots" or spot films may be taken.

Will it hurt?

No

How long will the examination take?

The examination typically takes 15 minutes to complete.

When may I eat?

You may eat as soon as the examination is over. You should eat plenty of fruit and vegetables and drink extra fluids, to remove any left over barium from the bowel.

How will I learn the results?

The results will be sent to your doctor who will discuss the results with you.