

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Having a barium small bowel meal

Your doctor has advised that you have a barium small bowel meal. This leaflet aims to explain what will happen and answer frequently asked questions.

We will ask you to drink a white chalky fluid containing barium, which passes gradually through the small bowel and allows us to see it using x-rays.

We obtain images of your small bowel at intervals while the barium is passing through.

The speed at which the barium passes through the bowel varies from person to person. We usually need to wait for the barium to make its way along the whole length of your small bowel. We can sometimes complete the examination within one hour or it could take as long as three to four hours.

You will not be able to leave the department during this time but you will be free to move around. You may like to bring a book or a magazine with you.

Before the examination

It is important that the stomach is completely empty. Please do not eat or drink for at least **six hours** before your appointment time.

Please leave any valuables at home. You are responsible for all personal items you bring into the hospital and the Trust cannot accept responsibility for their loss or damage.

After the examination

You may eat and drink normally. The barium is not absorbed by the body and makes its way out through the bowel over the next few days, so you might notice a whiter stool than normal.

If you have diabetes

Usual advice is **not** to take your usual morning insulin or diabetic tablets (such as metformin) but to bring them with you to take after the examination. Please bring something to eat if you need it. You may also wish to seek advice from the person who usually looks after your diabetes.

Ionising radiation

This examination involves x-rays. We minimise your dose of x-rays so that the benefits of the examination outweigh the risks.

Results

The radiologist will study the images and will send a report to the hospital team that requested the examination.

Contacting us

If you have queries you can contact the x-ray department on 01623 672202.

Your radiology records

This Trust is part of a group of NHS hospitals in the East Midlands that have a shared NHS radiology system, which is used by our healthcare professionals to access your radiology records.

If necessary, your radiology records may also be accessed by healthcare professionals in other NHS hospitals in the East Midlands or NHS Service Providers, to ensure you receive consistent, safe and effective clinical care and treatment, irrespective of where you receive your care.

If you have any concerns about providing information or how we use it, please discuss this with radiology staff so that you fully understand the potential impact on your care or treatment.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

We are available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

If you would like this information in an alternative format, such as in large print, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know.

You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515 extension 6927.

To be completed by the Communications office
Leaflet code: PIL202512-07-USBOWM
Created: September 2017 / Revised: December 2025 /
Review Date: December 2027