

# Procedure Information: Modified Swallow

## **What is a Modified Swallow?**

A modified barium swallow or video esophagram is a radiologic examination of swallowing function that uses a special movie-type x-ray called fluoroscopy. The patient is observed swallowing various consistencies and textures, ranging from thin barium to barium-coated cookies in order to evaluate his or her ability to swallow safely and effectively. This exam is performed with a speech-language pathologist present.

## **When is a Modified Swallow ordered?**

A modified swallow may be ordered for the following reasons:

- Dysphasia
- coughing and/or choking while eating or drinking
- coughing, choking or drooling with swallowing
- wet-sounding voice
- changes in breathing when eating or drinking
- frequent respiratory infections
- known or suspected aspiration pneumonia
- masses on the tongue, pharynx or larynx
- muscle weakness, involving the pharynx
- Neurologic disorders likely to affect swallowing

## **Patient Preparation**

There is no special preparation for this exam.

Report 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment time.

## **What happens during a Modified Swallow procedure?**

A radiographer will take you to the exam room. They will verify your identity (name and date of birth) and obtain medical history for the radiologist. You will be sitting in a chair for this exam. A radiologist and speech pathologist will guide you through the swallow exam. You will be directed to eat and drink controlled amounts of, foods and liquids in a variety of consistencies to which barium, a contrast material, has been

added. As you eat and drink, the speech pathologist and radiologist will watch you swallow. The images are captured digitally, so they can be reviewed later.

### **Length of procedure**

This exam usually takes about 15-30 minutes.

### **What will I experience during and after the procedure?**

You may find the taste and consistency of the barium unpleasant. You may resume your normal diet, unless the speech pathologist or doctor tells you otherwise. For a day or two following your exam your bowel movements may look white because of the barium, this is normal. Sometimes the barium can cause temporary constipation which is usually treated by an over-the-counter laxative.

### **What are the risks?**

If barium accidentally gets into your lungs because you choke, it does not cause any lasting harm. There is also a slight chance that some barium could be retained in the bowels leading to a blockage of the digestive system.

Consult your doctor if you have concerns following the exam.