

# Procedure Information: Barium Swallow or Upper GI Series

## What is a Barium Swallow or Upper GI series?

An examination that evaluates only the pharynx and esophagus is called a Barium Swallow.

An Upper GI (gastrointestinal) Series is a radiographic exam in which the esophagus, stomach and first part of the small bowel (duodenum) is filled with barium.

Both exams allow the radiologist to assess your anatomy and function as barium is orally ingested and watched under fluoroscopy as it coats the esophagus, stomach and duodenum lining.

## When is a Barium Swallow or Upper GI ordered?

Esophagus and stomach exams are ordered to detect function and various abnormalities such as:

Ulcers	Tumors
Inflammation of structures	Hernias
Blockages	Scarring

Some symptoms you may be having may also prompt an upper GI to be ordered by your doctor such as:

Difficulty swallowing	Severe Indigestion
Vomiting	Reflux of Heartburn
Chest and abdomen pain	Blood in Stools

## Patient Preparation

**Barium Swallow:** No prep is required.

**Upper GI series:** Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the day before the exam. To ensure best possible image quality, your stomach must be empty. Please refrain from chewing gum on day of your exam. You may take a prescription medicine with a sip of water. If you are diabetic, call your doctor for diet and medicine instructions.

Report 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment time.

## What happens during an Upper GI Series procedure?

You will be taken to a private changing room to put on a hospital gown. A radiographer will take you to an exam room, verify your identity (name and birth date) and obtain medical history for the radiologist. You will start the procedure in a standing position on an examination table platform. You may be given baking soda crystals (similar to Alka-Seltzer) which will add air to your stomach. This will give you a full or gaseous sensation, which may make you feel the need to belch. However, please try to hold the gas until the exam is complete. The radiologist will ask you to drink a liquid barium mixture which resembles a white milk shake. As you drink the barium mixture the radiologist will position you from side to side, have you drink standing and lying down while imaging the esophagus, stomach and duodenum as it is coated with barium.

## Length of procedure

The exam is usually completed within 30 minutes.

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

You may have the sensation to belch during the exam from the gas-producing crystals. A fullness or heaviness in your stomach after the exam from drinking the barium is also common. The barium may color your stools white or gray for 48 to 72 hours after the procedure. Upon completion of the exam, you are asked to drink plenty of fluids to help your body get rid of the barium. You could have temporary constipation from the barium. You may also take a mild laxative to help rid your body of the barium but only with your doctor's approval. Please return to normal diet unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

## What are the risks?

Some barium can be retained causing a blockage in the digestive tract. Consult your doctor if you have concerns following the exam.