Esophagram
About your procedure

What is an esophagram?
An esophagram is an exam to study the function and appearance of the esophagus and assess the swallowing process.

How does the exam work?
Small amounts of X-rays are passed through your body. When a special X-ray film plate is exposed to the absorbed X-rays, a detailed picture of your esophagus is captured.

Contrast material is used to provide clear detail of the esophagus. Liquid barium sulfate suspension, a thick, non-absorbable metallic substance, is the contrast material that you will swallow. The barium coats the inside of your esophagus and creates a clear picture.

How should I prepare?
- Tell your doctor about any recent illnesses or other medical conditions, as well as any allergies you might have to medicines.
- Tell your doctor or the radiology technologist if there is any chance you are pregnant.
- Eat your regular diet the evening before your exam.
- After midnight, do not eat or drink anything. Also, do not smoke or chew gum.
- It is OK to take your essential prescribed oral medicine with small sips of water.
- We will ask you to change into a gown before your exam.
- You will need to remove jewelry, glasses, or any other metal objects that could affect the pictures.

An esophagram is an exam that allows your doctor to see the inside of your esophagus. Read this handout to learn how the exam works, how it is done, how to prepare for it, what to expect during the exam, and how to get your results.
How is the exam done?

The radiologist or technologist will talk with you about details of the exam and will explain rare problems that may need special attention. This exam takes about 30 minutes.

You will be given a cup of barium sulfate (the consistency of a milkshake) to drink while the radiologist watches and evaluates your swallowing process with fluoroscopy (an X-ray unit combined with a TV monitor). As the barium coats the lining of your esophagus, images are taken to track the pathway to your stomach. We will help place you in different positions during your exam.

What will I feel during the exam?

There is no discomfort caused by this exam.

After the exam, you may return to your normal diet and your usual activities, unless you are advised otherwise by your doctor.

Because the barium is white, your stool may be chalky and light-colored for 1 to 3 days. This is normal.

Drink extra water for 24 hours after your exam.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist trained to interpret your esophagram will review the exam and send a report to your primary care doctor. Your doctor will give you your test results. Based on the findings, you and your doctor will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, if needed.