An upper GI exam provides a clear view of the esophagus, stomach, and first part of the small intestine. Read this handout to learn about 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.

**Upper GI Exam**

*About your procedure*

**What is upper gastrointestinal (GI) tract radiography?**

Upper gastrointestinal (GI) tract radiography is an X-ray exam of the esophagus, stomach, and first part of the small intestine. For the organs to show up on film, the upper GI tract must be coated or filled with a contrast material called barium, an element that appears bright white on the pictures.

Some patients are asked to swallow baking-soda crystals to create gas and further improve the pictures. This is called air-contrast or double-contrast upper GI.

**How does the exam work?**

First, the radiologist watches the flow of barium into your upper GI tract through a fluoroscope, a device that projects pictures in a movie-like sequence onto a screen. Still pictures are then taken.

**How should I prepare for the exam?**

- Your doctor will give you detailed instructions on how to prepare for your upper GI exam.
- You may eat your regular diet the evening before your exam.
- After midnight the night before your exam, do not eat or drink anything. Also, do not smoke or chew gum.
- It is OK to take your essential prescribed medicines with small sips of water.
- Before your exam begins, we will ask you to remove all jewelry and put on a gown.
How is the exam done?
Upper GI exams are often scheduled in the morning to reduce the amount of time you have to fast.
1. A radiology technologist will place you on a table next to the X-ray camera.
2. You may be asked to swallow baking-soda crystals (sometimes called *fizzies*), which will create gas in your stomach.
3. You will then be asked to drink a cup of liquid barium, which looks like a light-colored milkshake.
4. The radiologist will note the passage of barium into your esophagus and stomach.
5. Once your upper GI tract is coated with the barium, still pictures are taken.
6. The exam is usually done within 20 minutes.

What will I feel during the exam?
- The liquid barium has a chalky taste, although it can be masked by added flavors, such as strawberry, cherry, or vanilla.
- If you receive gas-producing crystals (*fizzies*), you may feel the need to burp. The radiologist or technologist will tell you to hold the gas in because it makes the pictures of the stomach more detailed.
- First you will be standing up, then lying down, as the radiologist takes pictures of your esophagus and stomach.
- You will need to hold your breath to prevent blurring of the still images.
- You will be asked to move into different positions while standing, and while lying on the exam table.
- As the exam continues, you may be asked to drink more barium.
- During this exam, you may hear the noises of the X-ray camera moving into place.
- After your exam, you will be asked to wait. The radiologist will review the pictures for quality.
- If the X-rays are clear, you can dress and leave the exam room. More imaging will be done if needed.
- After your exam, you can resume your normal diet and take all your medicines unless told otherwise by your doctor.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. Clinic staff are also available to help.

- UWMC Imaging Services: 206-598-6200
- Harborview Imaging Services: 206-744-3105

- You should drink an extra 4 to 8 glasses of water after your exam.
- Your stools may appear gray or white for 48 to 72 hours after your exam as your body clears the barium from your system.
- The barium can make it hard for you to move your bowels. If you do not have a bowel movement for more than 2 days after your exam, or are unable to pass gas, call your doctor promptly.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

Most patients have an upper GI exam because their primary care doctor (referring doctor) has ordered it. A radiologist, trained to interpret upper GI exams, will review the exam and send a report to your primary care doctor, who will give you your test results. Based on the findings, you and your primary care doctor will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, if needed.