

Defecography

About your procedure

Read this handout to learn about how a defecography exam works, how it is done, how to prepare for it, what to expect during the exam, and how to get your results.

What is a defecography exam?

Defecography is an X-ray exam that shows the rectum and anal canal during *defecation* (having a bowel movement). This exam helps your doctor see how well your pelvic floor muscles and rectum work.

Why is this exam done?

This exam may be done if you have one or more of these problems:

- *Rectal intussusception* (one part of the rectum slides into another part of the rectum), or *prolapse* (part of the rectum is outside the anus).
- Incomplete emptying of stool, so that you have to use your fingers or other methods to fully empty your rectum
- *Fecal incontinence* (not being able to hold stool in) or soiling
- Problems with how your anus or rectum work before and after a medical treatment or surgery
- *Rectoceles* (bulge in the wall of the rectum) and *enteroceles* (the small intestine pushes into the top part of the vagina and creates a bulge).



Your exam will be done in the Radiology/Imaging Services department.

How is the exam done?

- For this exam, a semi-solid *barium* material will be put inside your rectum. You will then be asked to empty your rectum on a special *commode* (toilet). We will take X-ray images as the barium material leaves your body.
- *If you were assigned female at birth:* We will also coat your vagina with a *contrast* (X-ray dye) material.



To prepare for your exam:

- Take your regular medicines with small sips of water at least 2 hours before your exam.
- Do **not** eat or drink anything for 2 hours before your exam.

- Some patients may find this exam awkward, but it provides helpful information that will help your doctor diagnose your problem.
- How does the exam work?
- First, the radiologist will use a *fluoroscope* to watch the barium flow into your lower *gastrointestinal* (GI) tract. The fluoroscope projects moving pictures onto a screen. Then, still pictures are taken from the moving pictures.

How should I prepare for the exam?

- If you have diabetes, you may need to adjust your diabetes medicines. Talk with your diabetes care provider at least 2 weeks before your exam to get instructions.
- *If you were assigned female at birth:* Tell your provider if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if there is any chance you could be pregnant.

On Exam Day

- Do **not** eat or drink anything for 2 hours before your exam.
- Take your usual medicines with small sips of water at least 2 hours before your exam.
- You do **not** need to do an enema or anything else to prepare your rectum.
- You must arrive 2 hours before your scheduled exam.
- *If you were assigned female at birth:* Tell the technologist if there is any chance you could be pregnant.

What can I expect?

- When you arrive, we will give you barium to drink.
- Plan to be at the medical center about 3 hours total. It will take 2 hours to prepare you for the exam. The actual exam takes about 15 to 30 minutes.
- The technologist will offer you a sanitary pad to absorb any barium that may leak from your rectum.
- After your exam, drink extra fluids to help flush the rest of the barium from your body.

What will I feel during the exam?

- The exam is not painful.
- As the barium paste fills your rectum, you will feel the need to have a bowel movement.
- It is normal to feel pressure in your belly, or even a little cramping. Most people can put up with this mild discomfort. If you are having trouble, tell the technologist.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist will interpret the results of your exam and send a report to your primary care provider. Your provider will give you your test results.

Based on the results, you and your provider will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, if needed.

You may also read your results on your MyChart page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call 206.598.6206.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

UWMC - Montlake Imaging
Services: 206.598.6200