

## Esophagram

### *How to prepare and what to expect*

*This handout explains how an esophagram works, how to prepare, what to expect, and how to get your results.*

### **What is an esophagram?**

An *esophagram* studies how well your *esophagus* is working. The esophagus is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach. The exam will also assess your swallowing process.

### **How does the exam work?**

You will swallow a liquid *contrast* (X-ray dye) called *barium sulfate* that is thick like a milkshake. Barium is a heavy metal powder. It is not absorbed by the body.

The barium will coat the inside of your esophagus. This helps details show clearly on the X-ray images. Small amounts of X-rays are then passed through your body.

We may also ask you to swallow baking soda crystals with liquid. This creates gas and helps improve the images. This is called an *air-contrast* or *double-contrast* esophagram.

### **How do I prepare?**

- Tell your provider about:
  - Recent illnesses or other medical conditions
  - Allergies you have to medicines, especially if you have ever had a reaction to contrast
- *Women:* Tell your provider if there is any chance you are pregnant.



*Talk with your provider about the results of your esophagram.*

### **The Night Before**

- Eat as usual the evening before your exam.
- After midnight, do **not** eat or drink anything, or smoke or chew gum.

### **The Day of Your Exam**

- Do not eat or drink anything, or smoke or chew gum.

- Take your prescribed medicines with **only** small sips of water.
- We will ask you to:
  - Change into a gown before your exam
  - Remove jewelry, glasses, and metal objects that could affect the images

## What can I expect?

- The radiologist or technologist will explain how the exam works and tell you about rare problems that can occur and that would require special attention.
- While you drink the barium, the radiologist will use a *fluoroscope* (an X-ray machine that shows live images on a monitor) to watch you swallow.
- We will help place you in different positions during your exam so that we can take images from different angles.
- This exam takes about 30 minutes.

## What will I feel during the exam?

An esophagram should not cause any discomfort.

## What happens after the exam?

- After your exam, you will be asked to wait while the radiologist reviews the pictures for quality. More X-rays will be done if needed. If the images are clear, you can dress and leave the exam room.
- After your exam, you can resume eating as usual and take all your medicines, unless your provider tells you otherwise.
- Drink 4 to 8 glasses of water to help move the barium out of your body.
- 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 you cannot pass gas, call your doctor right away.

### Questions?

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

UWMC Imaging Services: 206.598.6200

HMC Imaging Services: 206.744.3105

## Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A *radiologist* is a doctor who is skilled in reading radiology exams. A radiologist who is trained to interpret esophagrams will review your X-rays and send a report to your primary care or referring provider. The radiologist will not talk with you about your X-ray images.

Your own provider will give you your results. You may also read your results on your eCare Results page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call Radiology Records at 206.598.6206.

You and your provider will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.