

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?

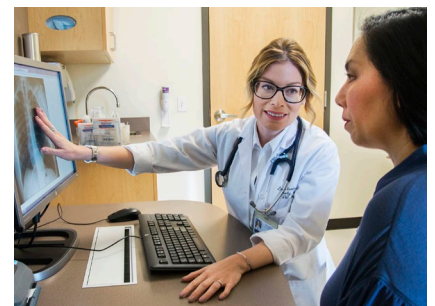
We will ask you to swallow a liquid *contrast* (X-ray dye) called *barium sulfate*. This liquid is thick like a milkshake. Barium is a heavy metal powder. Your body will not absorb it.

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 health issues
 - Allergies you have to contrast or other medicines
- *If you were assigned female at birth:* Tell your provider if there is any chance you are pregnant.



Talk with your provider about the results of your exam.

The Night Before Your Exam

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

Exam Day

- Do **not** eat or drink anything, or smoke or chew gum.
- Take your prescribed medicines with **only** small sips of water.

- *If you were assigned female at birth:* **Before** the exam begins, tell the technologist if there is any chance you are pregnant.
- Before the exam begins, we will ask you to:
 - Change into a gown
 - Remove jewelry, glasses, and any metal objects

What can I expect?

- The technologist will explain the exam. They will tell you about rare problems that can occur, that would need special attention.
- While you drink the barium, the radiologist will watch you swallow using a *fluoroscope* (an X-ray machine that shows live images).
- 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?

- We will ask you to wait while the radiologist reviews the images for quality. We may take more X-rays if needed. If the images are clear, you can dress and leave the exam room.
- After your exam, resume eating as usual and take all your medicines, unless your provider tells you otherwise.
- Over the next 24 hours, 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 if 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 - Montlake Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- UWMC - Northwest Imaging Services: 206.668.2073
- HMC Imaging Services: 206.744.3105

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

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 images.

Your own provider will give you your results. You and your provider will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

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