

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.



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What is an esophagram?

An esophagram studies your swallowing process and how well your esophagus is working. The esophagus is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach.

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.

The barium will coat the inside of your esophagus. When you swallow the barium, the radiologist will use a fluoroscope to watch it flow through your esophagus. The barium will appear bright white on the X-rays and show clear details of the esophagus.

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

The Night Before Your Exam

- Eat as usual the evening before your exam.



Talk with your provider about the results of your exam.

Exam Day

Starting 6 hours before your esophagram:

- Do **not** eat or drink anything.
- Do **not** smoke or chew gum.
- It is OK to take your prescribed medicines with 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.
- A technologist will help you get into position on an exam table.
- You will first stand up, then lie down, as the radiologist takes X-rays of your esophagus.
- We will ask you to drink a cup of liquid barium, which is like a thin berry flavored milkshake. It may taste a little chalky.
- The radiologist will use the fluoroscope to watch your esophagus as you swallow. We will take images as the barium coats the lining of your esophagus.
- The technologist will help place you in various positions during the exam so we can view your esophagus from different angles.
- We may ask you to drink more barium during the exam.
- You may hear noise when the fluoroscope moves and takes images.

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 your bowels to move. 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.

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 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.

Questions?

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

- HMC Imaging Services:
206.744.3105
- UWMC - Montlake
Imaging Services:
206.598.6200
- UWMC - Northwest
Imaging Services:
206.668.2073