

## Pharyngogram

### *What to expect and how to prepare*

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

### **What is a pharyngogram?**

A *pharyngogram* is an X-ray exam. It uses a *fluoroscope* to study your throat (*pharynx*) and your ability to swallow. A fluoroscope is an X-ray machine that shows live pictures on a monitor.

### **How does it work?**

We will ask you to swallow a liquid *contrast agent* called *barium*. The barium will coat the inside of your pharynx.

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

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

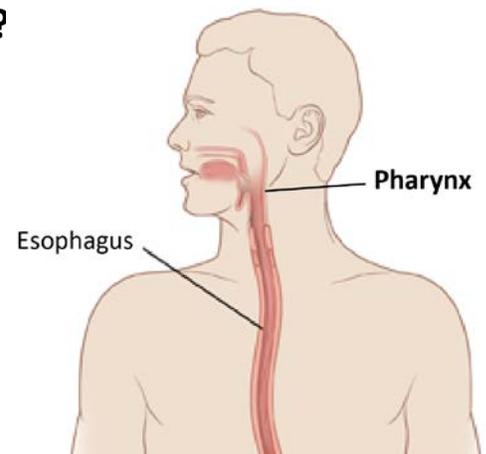
Most patients have this exam because their primary care provider (PCP) has ordered it. Your PCP will explain how to prepare for your exam, as needed.

Be sure to tell your PCP:

- If you have had any recent illnesses or other health issues
- About any allergies you have to medicines
- If you have ever had a reaction to contrast that contains iodine

### **Women**

Tell your PCP if there is any chance you are pregnant.



*The pharynx and esophagus are part of the upper digestive system.*

## **The Night Before**

You may eat your evening meal as usual.

## **Exam Day**

Starting 6 hours before your pharyngogram:

- 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.

## **What can I expect?**

- The exam will take about 30 minutes.
- We will ask you to change into a hospital gown.
- We will ask you to remove jewelry, metal, and any plastic objects that could show up on the X-ray images.

## **How is the exam done?**

- A technologist will help you get into position on an exam table.
- We will ask you to drink a cup of liquid barium, which is like a thin milkshake.
- The radiologist will use the fluoroscope to watch your pharynx as you swallow. We will take mages as the barium coats the lining of your pharynx.
- If your doctor asked for a “video swallow study,” a speech therapist will be present for your exam. They will give you different textures of barium and watch how your pharynx responds to each one.

## **What will I feel during the exam?**

- The liquid barium has a berry flavor, but may taste a little chalky.
- You will first stand up, then lie down, as the radiologist takes X-rays of your pharynx and esophagus.
- We will ask you to move into different positions while you are standing.
- We may ask you to drink more barium during the exam.
- You may hear noise when the fluoroscope moves and takes images.

## What happens after the exam?

- We will ask you to wait while the radiologist reviews the pictures for quality. We will do more X-rays if needed. If the images are clear, you may leave the exam room and get dressed.
- You can resume eating as usual and take your medicines, unless your PCP tells you otherwise.

## Self-care at Home

- **For the next 3 days**, drink 4 to 8 glasses of water a day. This will help clear the barium from your body.
- Your stools may appear gray or white for 48 to 72 hours after your exam. This is caused by the barium.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or caffeine after your exam, since they can cause hard stools (constipation). If you do drink alcohol or caffeine, you must also drink extra water.
- If you are constipated, take a stool softener or laxative.
- Call your doctor **right away** if:
  - You do not have a bowel movement for more than 2 days after your exam.
  - You cannot pass gas

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

The radiologist will talk with you briefly about your X-ray images. A radiologist who is trained to interpret pharyngograms will do a full review of your images and send a report to your PCP.

Your own PCP will give you your exam 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 PCP will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

### Questions?

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

- UW Medical Center Imaging Services:
  - Montlake campus:  
206.598.6200
  - Northwest campus:  
206.368.1744
- Harborview Imaging Services: 206.744.3105