

Small Bowel Follow Through Exam

What to expect and how to prepare

This handout explains how a small bowel follow through exam works. It includes how to prepare, what to expect, and how to get your results.

What is a small bowel follow through exam?

A *small bowel follow through* (SBFT) exam is an exam of the small intestine. The exam uses a special type of X-ray called *fluoroscopy*. A fluoroscope takes real-time moving images of your intestines.

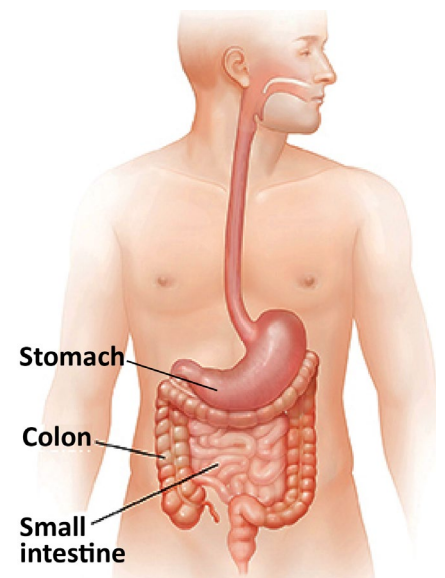
How does the exam work?

Before the exam, we will ask you to swallow a liquid *contrast agent* called *barium*. The barium coats the inside of your intestines and appears bright white on the X-rays. This helps details of your intestines show more clearly on the images.

How do I prepare?

Most patients have this exam because their primary care provider (PCP) has ordered it. Your PCP will give you details on 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
- *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.



The small intestine is part of the lower digestive tract.

The Night Before

- You may eat your evening meal as usual.
- Do **not** eat anything after midnight

The Morning of Your Exam

- Do **not** eat or drink anything.
- Do **not** smoke or chew gum.
- It is OK to take prescribed medicines with small sips of water.

What can I expect?

- We usually schedule this exam in the morning. This shortens the length of time you have to go without eating or drinking.
- We will ask you to put on a hospital gown and pants.
- *If you were assigned female at birth:* **Before** the exam begins, tell the technologist if there is any chance you could be pregnant.
- You must remove jewelry, metal, and any plastic objects that could show up on the X-ray images.
- The exam can take from 1 to 5 hours. This depends on how quickly the barium moves through your small intestine.

How is the exam done?

- The technologist will help you get into position on an exam table.
- We will then take an X-ray. This is done to get a “baseline” image of your intestines before you drink the barium.
- You will then drink 2 bottles of liquid barium, which is like a thin milkshake.
- After you swallow all the barium, we will take another X-ray. The fluoroscope will show how the barium is moving through your body.
- We will take more images as the barium moves through your small intestine.
- After we’ve taken enough images, we will ask you to wait while the radiologist reviews the pictures. We may take more X-rays, if the images are not clear. If the images are clear, you may leave the exam room and get dressed.

What will I feel during the exam?

- The liquid barium has a berry flavor, but may taste a little chalky.
- After you drink the 2 bottles of barium, you may feel full.
- You may hear noise when the fluoroscope is working.
- You will lie on a hard exam table while we take the X-rays.
- At times, we will ask you to:
 - Hold your breath and stay very still
 - Turn from side to side
 - Hold different positions
- At times, we may use a gloved hand or paddle to apply pressure to your belly.

What happens after the exam?

- You can resume eating as usual and take your medicines, unless your provider tells you otherwise.
- 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 because of the barium.
- If you are constipated, take a stool softener or laxative.
- If you drink alcohol or caffeine after your exam, you must also drink plenty of water. Otherwise, you could get constipated.
- **Call your provider** if it is more than 2 days after your exam and you have not had a bowel movement or cannot pass gas.

Questions?

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

- UWMC - Montlake Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- UWMC - Northwest Imaging Services: 206.668.2073
- Harborview Medical Center Imaging Services: 206.744.3105

Who interprets the results? How do I get them?

A specially trained radiologist will review your images and send a report to your PCP. The radiologist may also talk with you briefly about your images. Your PCP will give you your full exam results.

You and your PCP will then 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.