



Esophagram

How to prepare for your procedure

An esophagram is an exam that allows your doctor to see the inside of your esophagus. Read this handout to learn how the exam works, how it is performed, how to prepare for the exam, what to expect during the exam, and how to get your results.

What is an esophagram?

The esophagram is an exam to study the function and appearance of the esophagus and assess the swallowing process.

How does the exam work?

Small amounts of X-rays are passed through the body. When a special X-ray film plate is exposed to the absorbed X-rays, a detailed picture of the esophagus is captured.

Contrast material is used to provide clear detail of the esophagus. Liquid *barium sulfate suspension*, a thick, non-absorbable metallic substance, is the contrast material that is swallowed. The barium coats the inside of the esophagus and creates a clear picture.

How should I prepare?

- Tell your doctor about any recent illnesses or other medical conditions, as well as any allergies you might have to medications.
- Tell your doctor or the radiology technologist if there is any chance you are pregnant.
- After midnight, do not eat or drink anything. Also, do not smoke or chew gum.
- It is OK to take routine prescribed oral medicine with small amounts of water.
- You will change into a gown before your exam.
- You will need to remove jewelry, glasses, or any other metal objects that could affect the pictures.

Questions?

Call 206-598-6200

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help at any time.

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Services/Radiology :
206-598-6200

How is the exam performed?

The radiologist or technologist will discuss details of the exam and will explain rare problems that may need special attention. This exam takes about 30 minutes.

You will be given a cup of barium sulfate (with the consistency of a milkshake) to drink while the radiologist watches and evaluates the swallowing process with *fluoroscopy* (an X-ray unit combined with a TV monitor). As the barium coats the lining of the esophagus, images are taken to track the pathway to the stomach. You will be placed in various positions during the exam.

What will I feel during the exam?

There is no discomfort caused by this exam.

After the exam, you may return to a normal diet and your usual activities, unless you are advised otherwise by your doctor.

Because the barium is white, your stool may be chalky and light colored for 1 to 3 days. This is normal.

Drink extra water for 24 hours after the exam.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist trained to interpret the esophagram will review the pictures and send a report to your primary care doctor. The radiologist may not discuss the results with you. Your doctor will give you your test results. Based on the findings, you and your doctor will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

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