



# Small Bowel Follow Through Radiography

*How to prepare for your procedure*

Small bowel follow through (SBFT) is an X-ray exam of the small intestine to the large intestines. Read this handout to learn about 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 small bowel follow through radiography?

A small bowel follow through (SBFT) is an X-ray exam of the small and large intestines. A contrast material called barium is used to make the intestines show up clearly on film.

## How does the exam work?

First, the radiologist watches the flow of barium into the gastrointestinal (GI) tract using a fluoroscope, a device that projects pictures in a movie-like sequence onto a screen. Still images are then taken.

## How should I prepare for the exam?

- Your doctor will give you detailed instructions on how to prepare for your exam.
- The pictures can be affected if your stomach is not empty. You will likely be asked not to eat or drink anything (including medicine, especially antacids) after midnight on the morning of the exam.
- Do not chew gum or smoke after midnight.
- Before the exam begins, you will need to remove all jewelry and change into a gown.

## How is the procedure performed?

It is usually scheduled in the morning to reduce your time of fasting, and can take from 1 to 5 hours, depending on how quickly the barium moves through your body.

## 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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**206-598-6200**

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1. A radiology technologist will place you on a table next to the X-ray camera.
2. You will drink 2 bottles of liquid barium, which looks like a light-colored milkshake.
3. Once the barium has been consumed a still picture is taken.

## What will I feel during the exam?

- The liquid barium has a chalky taste that can be masked by added flavors such as strawberry, cherry, or vanilla. As you drink the 2 bottles of barium, you will feel full.
- You will be lying down as the radiologist takes pictures of the small bowel. You will be asked to hold your breath to prevent blurring of the still pictures.
- During the exam, you will be asked to turn from side to side, and to hold several different positions. At times, pressure may be applied to your abdomen.
- Once the exam is done, you will be asked to wait. The radiologist will check the pictures for quality. More pictures will be taken as needed. If the X-rays are clear, you may dress and go home.
- After the exam, you may return to a normal diet and lifestyle right away.
- Your stools may appear gray or white for 48 to 72 hours after the exam, as your body clears the barium from your system. You should drink extra water for 24 hours after the exam.
- You may have trouble moving your bowels. If you do not have a bowel movement for more than 2 days after your exam, or are unable to pass gas rectally, call your doctor promptly.

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

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

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