

Barium swallow for adults

Radiology Department



Patient information leaflet

This leaflet provides you with information about having a barium swallow. It explains what is involved and who you will meet.

What preparation is required?

Please do not eat or drink for at least **1 hour** prior to your appointment except for sips of water.

On the day of your appointment it would be helpful if you could remove and leave any earrings or necklaces at home where they will be safe. Watches are fine and will not have to be removed.

Please advise us in advance if you have any mobility problems, so that we may book you a longer appointment time.

Please note that our x-ray table has a patient weight limit of 23 stones or 146kg. If you know that you weigh more than this, it is important that you telephone the department on **01483 464150**.

Women of child bearing age

This examination is not advisable for pregnant women, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Please advise the x-ray department in advance if you think you are, or might be pregnant.

The Radiology Department

Radiology is also known as the X-Ray or Imaging Department.

Who will I meet?

- **Receptionist/Clerical Staff:** can help you make or change your imaging appointments and ensure your details are correct when you arrive for your appointment.
- **Radiographers:** a healthcare professional who will assist the radiologist.
- **Radiologist:** a specialist doctor trained to take images during the examination. They will also interpret the images and report them for your consultant.

What happens when I arrive?

Please register at the reception desk, where you will be directed to the waiting area. You will be shown to a private cubicle by a radiographer or other member of staff and asked to remove your outer clothes and change into the gown provided. There are baskets available for your belongings so that you can take them with you into the x-ray room.

What will happen during the examination?

Once in the x-ray room you will be asked to stand on an upright x-ray unit with handles to hold onto. We will need you to take a mouthful of barium liquid 4 or 5 times in different standing positions. The barium is similar to the thickness of a milkshake and has a sweet flavour.

The act of swallowing is very fast, on average it takes 7 seconds for liquid to travel down the oesophagus (gullet). For this reason the doctor will ask you to hold the barium in your mouth until you are instructed to swallow. This ensures that we co-ordinate the x-ray images with your swallow.

Occasionally we will give patients bread to swallow so that we can see what is happening when you swallow something more solid.

The doctor may also lay you down to check for any reflux (barium going back into the gullet from the stomach), which can cause "heartburn".

The examination takes approximately 10-15 minutes.

Are there any risks or side effects to the examination?

The examination is very safe. The barium is not absorbed into the body and therefore, it is unlikely to cause any problems. It may however, cause constipation so please follow the aftercare instructions.

There is a slight risk that the barium may go down the "wrong way" and go into your airway, this can usually be cleared by coughing or if necessary by having some physiotherapy. Please make us aware if you have previously noticed food/liquid going down the "wrong way" or if you get recurrent chest infections.

As with all x-ray examinations, we endeavour to keep the exposure to radiation to the absolute minimum. Your referring clinician has decided the risks from missing a serious disorder by not having this investigation outweighs the risk from the amount of radiation dose you will receive.

Is there an alternative examination?

Endoscopy (camera test) is the examination of choice for the stomach, however this barium test is equally as suitable when endoscopy is not possible.

Although endoscopy can see your whole oesophagus, there is no other test to show the function of the oesophagus (gullet).

Aftercare advice

You may return home, or to work following the examination and eat normally. You need to be aware that barium can temporarily alter your bowel habit, and may make you constipated. It is advisable to drink more fluids than normal to reduce the risk of constipation and to take your normal laxative preparation if necessary.

The barium will also be visible in your stools; they will appear whitish for a day or so. Please note barium is quite heavy and therefore the toilet may need a few flushes to clear it away properly.

When will I get the results?

The x-rays will be reported after your visit and the results sent to your referring doctor, which is normally within 14 days. If you already have a clinic appointment, you will receive the results then, otherwise you will receive a letter, either with the results or with a clinic appointment. If you were referred by your GP please make an appointment after the two week period.

Privacy and dignity

We will try to make your visit to our department as comfortable as we can.

Patient survey

We value your opinion about the service we provide. Please help us to improve the service by answering the voluntary questionnaire found with your appointment letter.

Reference source

- www.rcr.ac.uk/sites/default/files/docs/patients/worddocs/CRPLG_swallow.doc

Contact

If you have any questions or would like to know more about this examination, please contact the Radiology Department on:

Telephone: 01483 571122 ext: 2050 or 01483 464150

Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm

If you are unable to keep your appointment, please contact us as soon as possible.

Useful websites

- patient.info/health/barium-swallowmealfollow-through

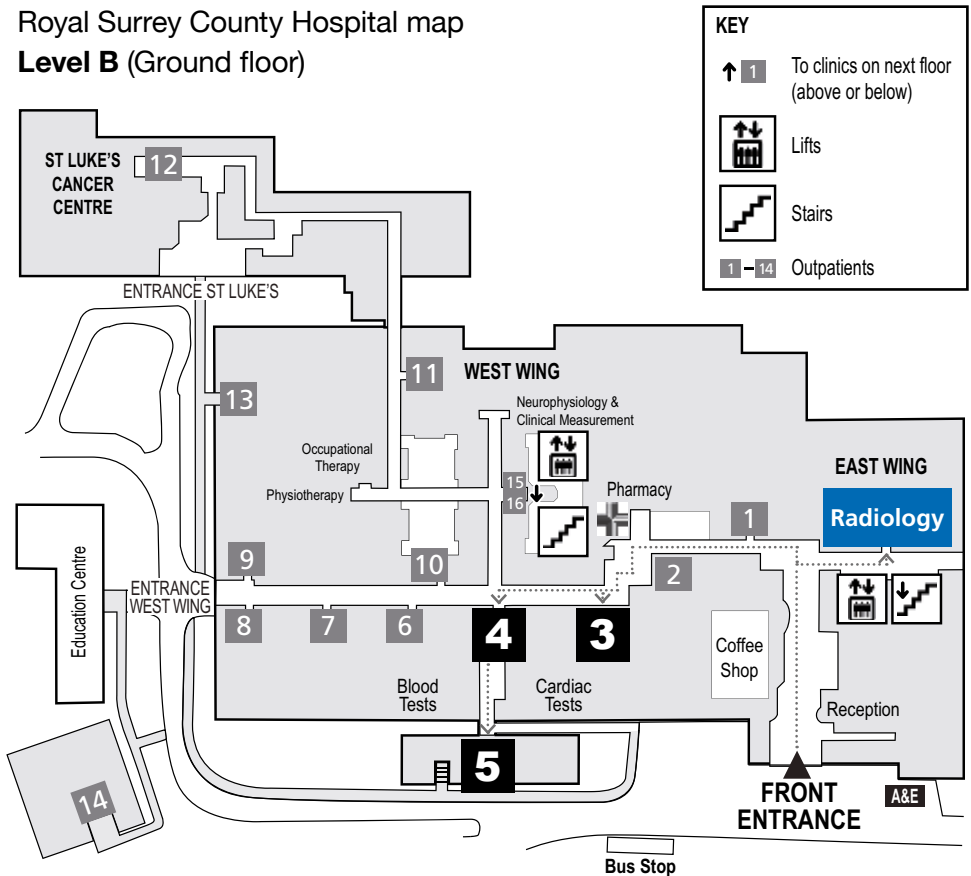
Information on radiation

- www.gov.uk/government/publications/ionising-radiation-dose-comparisons/ionising-radiation-dose-comparisons

How to find the Radiology Department

Royal Surrey County Hospital map

Level B (Ground floor)



Data sharing reference information is available on Royal Surrey County Hospital patient information leaflet entitled:

Your Healthcare records – your information, PIN120703–562

Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Egerton Road

Guildford

Surrey

GU2 7XX

www.royalsurrey.nhs.uk

Radiology Department contact details

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PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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Future review date: June 2020

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