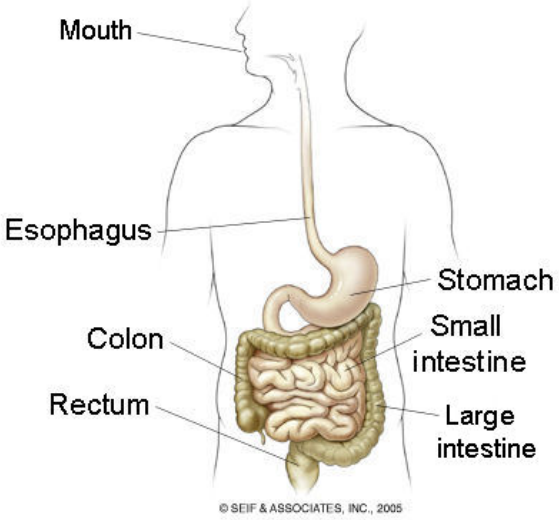
Upper GI and Esophagus Studies

Upper gastrointestinal x-ray studies are used to examine the esophagus, stomach, and small intestine. An upper GI may be ordered to evaluate symptoms such as pain, nausea, vomiting, swallowing problems, heartburn, unintended weight loss. An upper GI can diagnose a number of conditions, including ulcers, narrow areas of the GI tract, gastritis (inflammation of the stomach), hernias, abnormal growths or tumors, bulging areas in the wall of the GI tract (*diverticula*), and swollen veins in the esophagus (*esophageal varices*).



BEFORE THE PROCEDURE

The stomach and intestine have to be totally empty before this exam. Eating, drinking, smoking and chewing gum are not allowed for the 8 hours before the test. A laxative pill, special beverage, suppository or enema may be given the night before the test in order to make sure that all stool is out before the exam.

LET YOUR CAREGIVER KNOW ABOUT

- All allergies.
- All medications that you are taking, including over-the-counter preparations, dietary supplements, vitamins, or herbal preparations.
- Any previous complications from this or other tests.
- Smoking history.
- Possibility of pregnancy.
- History of bleeding problems.
- Any other health problems.

PROCEDURE

You will be asked to remove your clothing and wear a hospital gown. You will be given a chalky drink which contains an x-ray contrast material (*barium*). You may be asked to stand up, sit up, or lie on the x-ray table in various positions while as series of x-ray pictures are taken from a variety of angles. The whole test takes about 30 minutes to complete.

An upper GI series usually takes about 30 minutes to complete. Delayed x-rays may be necessary to evaluate the small bowel. Your x-rays will be examined by a radiology specialist. Your caregiver will be sent a copy of the results. Be sure to drink plenty of water after the procedure. This helps to flush any barium from your bowels. Call your caregiver if you have any questions about your x-ray results or your treatment.

RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS

The most common complication after an upper GI series is constipation from the barium. Many people also feel tired and slightly nauseous from drinking the barium. Serious complications of an upper GI series are rare, but may include:

- Bowel obstruction.
- Allergic reaction to the barium.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

- Drink a lot of water to flush the barium from your system.
- You may notice a sensation of bloating or some nausea.
- Passing the barium may turn your stools light-colored or white.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take all medications exactly as directed.
- Follow any prescribed diet.
- Follow instructions regarding both rest and physical activity.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop severe or lasting abdominal pain.
- You cannot pass gas.
- You are unable to have a bowel movement within two days.
- You get a fever.
- You get a skin rash.
- You have trouble swallowing.
- You have trouble breathing.

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