Modified Barium Swallow

A modified barium swallow is a test to evaluate swallowing and swallowing problems that can occur during normal eating and drinking.

A modified barium swallow does this in two ways:

- *Clinical evaluation.* A speech-language pathologist watches your lips, tongue, palate and larynx while you eat or drink. Sometimes the problem is not clear during this evaluation. Then the second part (called an *instrumental examination*) is required. For example, some patients may show *aspiration* (food or liquid entering the wind pipe) on x-ray examination without coughing and choking while eating or drinking.
- *Instrumental examination*. X-rays are used to directly view the parts of your body involved with normal chewing and swallowing.

The goal is to help the patient with changes in specific chewing and swallowing behaviors. These changes can improve the safety and efficiency of eating and swallowing.

During the procedure you will eat and swallow foods that contain a white chalky liquid. This liquid is called *barium*. Barium shows up during x-ray and outlines the structures it encounters. Barium allows for imaging of the process of swallowing. Because of the way barium works, it is often called a "contrast material". It is an easy, fast, and safe method for getting x-ray images.

BEFORE THE PROCEDURE

In general, no specific preparation is needed before the test. Your caregiver will provide specific instructions about taking or not taking regular prescription medications on the day of test. You may be asked to remove some or all of your clothes. You may be asked to wear a gown during the exam. You may also be asked to remove jewelry, eye glasses and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with x-ray images.

LET YOUR CAREGIVER KNOW ABOUT

- Allergies, especially to **contrast materials.**
- Medications taken including herbs, eye drops, over the counter medications, and creams.
- Use of steroids (by mouth or creams).
- Possible pregnancy, if applicable.
- History of blood clots (*thrombophlebitis*).
- History of bleeding or blood problems.
- Previous surgery.
- Other health problems.

THE PROCEDURE

- In the x-ray room, you sit upright in a chair, or you might be asked to stand.
- You are given different foods and liquids to chew and swallow. The food is covered with or contains barium.
- You may be asked to turn your head, sit back, hold your breath, cough or take small bites during the test.

RISKS & COMPLICATIONS OF THE PROCEDURE

- There is a rare chance of cancer from radiation exposure. But the benefit of an accurate diagnosis far outweighs the risk.
- Some patients may be allergic to the flavoring added to some brands of barium. If you have experienced allergic reactions after eating chocolate, certain berries or citrus fruit, be sure to tell your caregiver before the procedure.
- There is a rare chance that some barium could be retained. This could lead to a blockage of the digestive system. Patients who have an obstruction in the gastrointestinal tract should not undergo this test.

- Women should always inform their caregiver if there is any possibility that they are pregnant.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

The barium may color your stools gray or white for 48 to 72 hours after the procedure. Sometimes the barium can cause temporary constipation. This constipation is usually treated by an over-the-counter stool softener or laxative. Drinking larger than normal amounts of fluids following the test can also help.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

After the examination, you can resume a regular diet. You can take orally administered medications unless told otherwise by your doctor. Specific recommendations may be made based on the findings during the test.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- If you are unable to have a bowel movement. If your bowel habits undergo any significant changes following the exam, you should contact your caregiver.
- You experience worsening problems with swallowing, food “getting stuck”, nausea, or pain.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You experience choking.
- You develop vomiting
- You develop any chest pain, lightheadedness, unusual sweating, weakness, or you faint.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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