What is a barium swallow/barium meal?
A barium swallow is an X-ray of the oesophagus or gullet. A barium meal is an X-ray of the stomach and duodenum.
These parts of the body do not show up well on ordinary X-rays. If however, the lining of the gut is coated with barium, a white liquid that shows up on X-rays, then much greater detail is obtained.

Are there any side effects or risks?
You will be able to eat and drink normally straight away and for the first day or so, you should drink plenty of fluids. This will help the barium pass out of your system. Your stools will look white and remain discoloured for the next day or so. Some people may get slightly constipated, and taking a mild laxative should help in this case. Stools containing barium are sometimes difficult to flush from the lavatory pan and might need repeat flushing.
The radiation dose is about the same as the average person receives from background radiation over 8 months. Special precautions are taken to keep the radiation dose to a minimum.

What if I am pregnant?
This examination should not done on pregnant women, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Please advise the department if you think you are or might be pregnant.

Is there any special preparation?
Yes, this is very important. On the day before the examination please keep to a light diet. A light diet is one free from any residue or fibre. Fibre swells in the gut and adds bulk to the contents and will need more effort to clear from the digestive tract. Avoid fresh fruits, salads, vegetables and bran.
If you have a morning appointment you should have nothing to eat or drink after 10pm on the night before your examination.
If you have an afternoon appointment you should have nothing to eat or drink after 8am on the morning of your appointment.
It is important for the stomach to be completely empty.

Clinical Radiology
☎ 01722 336262 ext 4196
If essential medicines have to be taken, bring them with you so that you can take them immediately once the procedure has been finished. If in doubt please contact us for advice.

**What if I have diabetes?**

We try to give patients with diabetes a morning appointment, but unfortunately we are not always aware of patients' full medical history. If you have diabetes and have not been given a morning appointment, please do not hesitate to contact us.

- If your diabetes is controlled by diet only please follow your normal diet.
- If your diabetes is controlled by tablets - take half the normal dose the night before and omit the morning dose. Take your normal dose with your first meal after the examination.
- If your diabetes is controlled by insulin, omit your morning dose but bring your insulin and some breakfast to the department to have immediately after examination.

Please bring your glucometer with you.

If you are an insulin dependent diabetic and have any concerns then please ring the diabetic nurses on 01722 425176 a few days before your appointment.

**What do I do when I arrive in the department?**

Please report to the receptionist in the X-ray department first, then take a seat in the main reception waiting area. From here you will be collected by a member of the team, who will check your details. You will be shown to a private cubicle where you will be asked to undress and put on a hospital gown. The gown should be done up with the ties at the back.

Please bring your own dressing gown with you to wear while you are waiting.

You should place your clothes and personal items in one of the bags provided, which you keep with you.

You will be called into the X-ray room for the examination as soon as possible, but please bear in mind that the needs other patients may cause a delay.

**Who will I see?**

In the X-ray room will be a radiologist (an X-ray doctor) who will be directing the examination, a radiographer and usually a radiographer assistant as well.

**What happens during the barium examination?**

It will take about 20 minutes to do the examination

You will be taken into the X-ray room. You may then be asked to swallow a dessert-spoon of effervescent (fizzy) granules followed by a dessert spoon of sharp-tasting liquid neither of which taste unpleasant. This temporarily distends your stomach and will make you feel as though you have had a fizzy drink.

You will be asked to drink from a cup containing the barium, a sticky white liquid, which is mildly flavoured, one or two mouthfuls at a time. This coats the lining of the gullet and stomach, so that they show up on the TV monitor and on the X-ray films. You will be positioned in front of the X-ray camera, often standing on a small step attached to the couch in its upright position.
The radiologist watches the monitor and also takes pictures. If the stomach is to be imaged also, the machine will slowly tilt backwards, so that will be lying horizontally, and more pictures are taken. You will be asked to move into different positions and to hold your breath while the pictures are taken. You may also be asked to swallow the barium using a straw whilst lying down.

**What happens after the examination?**

Barium does not get absorbed by the body and so your stools will appear white for a few days. Sometimes barium can cause constipation, to avoid this you should drink plenty of fluids for at least 3 days after the examination.

It may take 2 to 3 days before your normal bowel habit returns. This is usual and is encouraged by returning to your normal diet.

You should be able to resume normal activities straight away.

**Can I eat and drink afterwards?**

Yes. Please eat and drink normally

**Can I drive home?**

Yes.

**How will I get the results?**

After the procedure the images will be examined by the radiologist and a report on the examination will be written and sent to the consultant who referred you. Your consultant will arrange a follow-up appointment.