

Modified Barium Swallow

About the procedure

A modified barium swallow is a test that uses a special imaging to help assess your swallowing problems. During the test, you will eat food and drink liquids mixed with a special contrast. The contrast provides your team with an image of your mouth and throat.

A special x-ray unit (fluoroscope) is connected to a monitor. This allows the speech pathologist and radiologist to see when food and liquids travel from your mouth to your esophagus. The images will be recorded. This procedure is sometimes called video fluoroscopy or cine fluoroscopy.

The 3 primary phases of swallowing are:

1. **Oral phase:** what happens in the mouth
2. **Pharyngeal phase:** what happens in the throat or pharynx
3. **Esophageal phase:** what happens as food passes through the esophagus (food tube) and into the stomach

Problems with swallowing can occur in one of these phases. Weakness in the muscles of your mouth (oral phase) can make it difficult for you to chew solid foods. A delay in the pharyngeal phase can make it difficult to swallow without coughing or choking.

Purpose

The test will help your speech/language pathologist and radiologist determine the cause of your swallowing problems. Your speech/language pathologist can show you ways to make eating and drinking easier and more enjoyable.

On the day of the test

Please do not bring valuables such as jewelry or credit cards. The hospital cannot be responsible for any lost valuables.

- Report to the Main Building, Diagnostic Imaging Area A on Floor 3, near Elevator C.
- You will be asked to wear a gown or scrub top. The procedure is performed in a fluoroscopy room.
- Trained staff members will provide instructions and answer any questions you may have.

During the test

- The speech-language pathologist will perform the x-ray under the supervision of a radiologist.
- You will be seated in an upright position in front of the fluoroscope unit.

- You will be seated in a special chair. It properly secures you if you are having difficulty sitting or standing.
- You will be asked to eat food or drink liquids in different amounts and consistencies containing barium.
- The speech-language pathologist will give you instructions on your swallowing techniques. You may be asked to cough during the swallowing process. The radiologist will watch the movement of the foods or liquids as you swallow on a monitor. While you are swallowing, you will hear the sound of the x-ray machine and the recording device.

Follow up care

- The speech-language pathologist will talk to you about the results of your test. They will make recommendations on your diet.
- Let your doctor know if you have changes in your bowel habits. (Note: it is normal for your stool to have a whitish color for up to 3 days after the test.)

If you have questions about this test, ask your doctor or nurse.