Barium Enema

About the test
A barium enema is an X-ray test of the large intestine (colon). This test shows the lining of the colon and rectum. Your colon and rectum must be empty of stool before this test. Follow the instructions below to be sure your body is ready for the test.

Important to tell us
- If you are pregnant, or think you might be, tell the radiologist before the test is done.
- If you have an allergy to contrast medicine, tell the doctor or radiologist.

To prepare for the test
- The day before the test, follow a clear liquid diet. Drink plenty of fluids.
- At 1:00 PM the day before, take 2 Dulcolax (generic is fine) tablets and drink one 10-ounce (oz) bottle of Magnesium Citrate. Both medicines can be purchased over the counter at any store with a pharmacy. If this does not work as a laxative, call your doctor’s office. Do not take Go-Lightly as a prep for this test. If you work the day before your test, you may want to take the laxatives after you get home.
- At 5:00 PM, or 4 hours after the first dose of laxatives, take 2 additional Dulcolax tablets.
- After midnight, do not eat or drink anything before your test.
- You may take any needed morning medicines with a small amount of water. If you take medicines that do not have to be taken in the morning, wait until after the test to take them.

Some patients have specific needs before this test:
- If you have a colostomy or ileostomy, contact your doctor’s office or the testing area the day before your test as test instructions can vary. Bring an extra bag and wafer with you when you come in for your test.
- If you have diabetes, call the doctor who treats your diabetes. Ask if you will need to adjust your insulin dosage because you will not be eating your normal diet before the test.

Day of the test
- Please arrive 20 minutes before your appointment time.
- Bring with you a list of your current medicines, your insurance card, and a photo ID.
During the test

- The test can take between 1 and 3 hours. Sedation is not possible with this test, however, the staff will try to make you as comfortable as possible. Please tell the staff if you have any discomfort.
- You will be asked to lie on your side and a lubricated tube will be placed into your rectum.
- A small balloon on the end of the tube will be inflated to help hold the tube in your rectum. A radiologist, a doctor who specializes in radiology, will watch as a barium mixture flows through the tube and into your colon.
- You will be asked to turn your body during the test. This is to help the barium coat the inside wall of your colon. Air will be added into the tube in your rectum to also slightly expand the colon and make it easier to see the bowel wall.
- After your colon is coated with the barium, x-rays will be taken by the technologist. You will then be taken to a restroom to empty the barium and air from your colon.

After the tests

If you have no other tests scheduled, you will be able to start your normal routine right after the test. The radiologist will send a report to the doctor who ordered the test. If this was not your primary care doctor, you may request a copy of the report to be sent to him or her.

- Drink plenty of water, but avoid carbonated beverages.
- Eat foods high in fiber, and/or take a mild laxative to help remove any remaining barium. Your stool may be white due to the barium for a day or two after the test.
- If you have a colostomy (a bag surgically attached to the large intestine to collect stools), irrigate it after the last x-ray is taken and again in the morning. The last x-ray may be taken as late as 3 hours after you first swallowed the barium.

When to call your doctor

Contact your doctor if:

- You have not passed the barium in your stool in 2 to 3 days after the exam.
- You have a pencil-thin stool or notice a change in your usual bowel habits.
- You have pain in your lower abdomen (belly) or stomach.
- Your stools are not normal in 3 days.
- You have questions or concerns about your illness, medicine, or the procedure.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call 614-293-4333. Radiology Scheduling will connect you to a qualified staff member who will answer your questions.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.

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