Blue Dye Test for Swallowing

A blue dye test, sometimes called a green dye test when green food coloring is used, checks for swallowing problems in a person with a tracheostomy. Swallowing problems can be caused by injury or disease in addition to the changes in the swallow function caused by the tracheostomy.

The Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) does this test at the bedside. The SLP has special training for treating swallowing and communication problems. A respiratory therapist or a nurse will be there to suction your trach.

The results of the blue dye test will help you, your doctor, and your SLP plan what type of foods and liquids are safe and easy for you to swallow. It may also help determine if other swallow testing is needed.

How is the test done?

You will be given a small amount of food or liquid that is dyed blue or green by the SLP. Blue or green dye is used because these colors are not normally found in your body. The nurse or respiratory therapist will be there to suction your trach after you swallow to check for the dye in your airway.

What does the test show?

The SLP will review the results of your test to see what problems you had with swallowing the various foods or liquids. If dye was suctioned from your airway after the swallow, or if you coughed up tinted blue or green secretions, the SLP and your doctor may do more testing to see if your swallow function is not working.
Your SLP will talk with you about the blue dye test results and any other tests that may be done. A swallowing plan and any special aides that may help you swallow more safely will be discussed with you.

Even if you had no dye in your airway after the test, it is common to have more testing to make sure small amounts of food or liquid are not going into your airway that could have been missed during suctioning.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have any questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.