Small Bowel Follow Through

About the test
A small bowel follow through is an x-ray test of the small intestines, also called the small bowel. This test shows the lining of your small intestines. Your doctor has ordered this test to check changes in the lining due to disease or blockage and to see how well your small intestines function.

Important to tell us
• If you are pregnant, or think you might be, tell the radiologist before the test is done.
• If you know you have an allergy to contrast medicine, please tell your doctor or the testing area when the exam is scheduled. You may need another medicine for this.

Day before the test
Your stomach must be empty for this test. Please follow these instructions:
• If you have diabetes, call the doctor who treats your diabetes and ask if you need to adjust your insulin because you will not be eating as normal before the test.
• The day before the test, follow a clear liquid diet and drink plenty of fluids. Your doctor will explain what you can have.
• 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 of these medicines can be purchased over the counter at any store with a pharmacy. If this does not work as a laxative, call with your doctor’s office. Do not take Go-Lightly. If you go to work, 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.
• Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night 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.

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 average time for this test is 2 hours, but it can range from 1 to 6 hours depending on how quickly your digestive tract is working. The staff will try to make you as comfortable as possible during the test. Tell us if you have any discomfort.
- A technologist will ask you to drink several cups of a barium mixture, which is a contrast medicine. This barium mixture will allow your small intestines to show up on the x-ray image.
- The technologist will take an x-ray of your abdomen every 15 to 30 minutes to follow the progress of the barium through the small intestine. Once the barium mixture reaches your large intestine, the radiologist, a doctor who specializes in radiology, may take a look at your small intestine under fluoroscopy (a motion picture x-ray).
- You may be asked to walk around to help the mixture move through the intestines.
- Feel free to bring reading or other materials to occupy your time between x-rays.

After the tests

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

- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water for the next 24 hours to move the barium through your body. Do not be alarmed if your stool contains some barium residue for a day or so after the test and looks chalky white.
- 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 6 hours after you first swallowed 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.