

Defecography

About your procedure

Read this handout to learn about how a defecography exam works, how it is done, how to prepare for it, what to expect during the exam, and how to get your results.

What is a defecography exam and how is it done?

Defecography is an X-ray exam that shows the rectum and anal canal as they change during *defecation* (having a bowel movement). For this exam, a semi-solid barium material will be put inside your rectum. You will then be asked to empty your rectum on a special commode (toilet). X-ray images will be taken as the barium material leaves your body.

If you are a woman, your vagina will also be coated with *contrast material*.

This exam helps your doctor see how well your pelvic floor muscles and rectum work during defecation. Some patients may find this exam awkward, but it provides helpful information that will help your doctor diagnose your problem.



Your exam will be done in the Radiology/Imaging Services department.

How does the exam work?

First, the radiologist will use a *fluoroscope* to watch the barium flow into your lower *gastrointestinal* (GI) tract. The fluoroscope projects moving pictures onto a screen. Then, still pictures are taken from the moving pictures.

Why is this exam done?

This exam may be done if you have one or more of these problems:

- *Rectal intussusception* (one part of the rectum slides into another part of the rectum), or *prolapse* (part of the rectum is outside the anus).
- Incomplete emptying of stool, so that you have to use your fingers or other methods to fully empty your rectum
- *Fecal incontinence* (not being able to hold stool in) or soiling
- Problems with how your anus or rectum work before and after a medical treatment or surgery



To prepare for your exam:

- Take your regular medicines with small sips of water at least 2 hours before your exam.
- Do not eat anything for 2 hours before your exam.

- *Rectoceles* (bulge in the wall of the rectum) and *enteroceles* (the small intestine pushes into the top part of the vagina and creates a bulge).

How should I prepare for the exam?

- Do **not** eat anything for 2 hours before your exam.
- If you have diabetes, you may need to adjust your diabetes medicines. Talk with your diabetes care provider at least 2 weeks before your exam to get instructions.
- Take your regular medicines with small sips of water at least 2 hours before your exam.
- You do **not** need to do an enema or anything else to prepare your rectum.

How is the exam done?

- You must arrive 2 hours before your scheduled exam.
- You will be given barium to drink when you arrive.
- Plan to be here about 3 hours total. It takes 2 hours to prepare, and the actual exam takes about 15 to 30 minutes.
- The radiology technologist will offer you a sanitary pad to absorb any barium that may leak from your rectum.
- After your exam, drink extra fluids to help flush the rest of the barium from your body.

What will I feel during the exam?

- The exam is not painful.
- As the barium paste fills your rectum, you will feel the need to have a bowel movement.
- It is normal to feel pressure in your belly, or even minor cramping. Most people can put up with this mild discomfort. If you are having trouble, tell the technologist.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Imaging Services:
206-598-6200

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

Most patients have a defecography exam because their primary care doctor advised them to have it. A radiologist will interpret the results of your exam and send a report to your primary care doctor. Your primary care doctor will give you your test results.

Based on the results, you and your primary care doctor will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, if needed.