

Pharyngogram

How to prepare and what to expect

A *pharyngogram* is an exam that checks the structure and function of your throat. This handout explains how the exam works, how to prepare, what to expect, and how to get your results.

What is a pharyngogram?

A *pharyngogram* is an X-ray exam that studies the throat (*pharynx*) and checks the swallowing process.

How does the exam work?

We will ask you to swallow liquid *barium sulfate suspension*, a thick metallic substance. This liquid coats the inside of your pharynx so that clear pictures can be taken. The barium is not absorbed by your body.

Small amounts of X-rays are then passed through your body. A detailed picture of your pharynx will show on a monitor.

How do I prepare?

- Tell your doctor about any recent illnesses or other medical conditions you have had, as well as any allergies you might have to medicines, especially if you have had an allergic reaction to *contrast* (X-ray dye).
- *Women:* Tell your doctor or radiology technologist if there is any chance you are pregnant.

The Day Before

- You may eat as usual the evening before your exam.
- After midnight:
 - Do not eat or drink anything.
 - Do not smoke or chew gum.

The Morning of Your Exam

- Do not eat or drink anything, and do not smoke or chew gum.



Talk with your referring provider about the results of your pharyngogram.

- If you need to take prescribed medicine, take it with only small sips of water.

At the Hospital

Before your exam, we will ask you to:

- Change into a hospital gown
- Remove jewelry, glasses, and any metal objects that could affect the images

How is the exam done?

- The radiologist or radiology technologist will describe how the exam is done and will explain rare problems that could occur.
- You will be given a cup of barium sulfate to drink. The barium is thick like a milkshake.
- The radiologist will watch your swallowing process with a *fluoroscope* (an X-ray machine that shows live pictures on a monitor). Images are taken as the barium coats the lining of your pharynx and *esophagus* (the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach).
- We will help place you in different positions during your exam.
- This exam takes about 30 minutes.

What will I feel during the exam?

- This exam should not cause any discomfort.
- Liquid barium has a chalky taste. It may have added flavors, such as strawberry, cherry, or vanilla.
- We may ask you to swallow baking soda crystals (sometimes called *fizzies*). If you swallow the fizzies, you may feel the need to burp. The radiologist or technologist will ask you to hold the burp in because the gas in your esophagus helps make the pictures more detailed.
- You will first stand up, then lie down, as the radiologist takes X-rays of your pharynx and esophagus.
- You will need to hold your breath when each picture is taken to prevent blurring of the images.
- We will ask you to move into different positions while standing, and while lying on the exam table. You will also be asked to roll back and forth on the table.
- We may ask you to drink more barium during the exam.
- You may hear noise when the fluoroscope moves.

What happens after the exam?

- We will ask you to wait while the radiologist reviews the pictures for quality. More X-rays will be done if needed. If the images are clear, you can dress and leave the exam room.
- You can resume eating as usual and take all your medicines, unless your provider tells you otherwise.
- Drink 4 to 8 glasses of water over the rest of the day to help move the barium out of your body.
- Your stools may look gray or white for 48 to 72 hours after your exam. This is from the barium. It will go away as your body clears the barium from your system.

When to Call

The barium can make it hard for you to move your bowels. Some constipation is normal, but call your doctor **right away** if you:

- Do not have a bowel movement for more than 2 days after your exam
- Cannot pass gas

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist who is trained to interpret pharyngograms will review your X-rays and send a report to your primary care or referring provider. The radiologist will briefly talk with you about your X-ray images.

Your own provider will give you your full exam results. You may also read your results on your eCare Results page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call Radiology Records at 206.598.6206.

You and your provider will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

Questions?

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

- UWMC Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- HMC Imaging Services: 206.744.3105