

Upper GI Exam

What to expect and how to prepare

This handout explains how an upper GI exam works, how to prepare, what to expect, and how to get your results.

What is an upper GI exam?

An upper GI (*gastrointestinal*) exam is an X-ray exam of the esophagus, stomach, and first part of the small intestine. The exam uses *contrast* (X-ray dye) and *fluoroscopy* (a special type of X-ray).

How does the exam work?

To help details of your GI tract show on the X-rays, you will swallow a liquid contrast called *barium*. The barium coats the inside of your GI tract and appears bright white on the X-ray images.

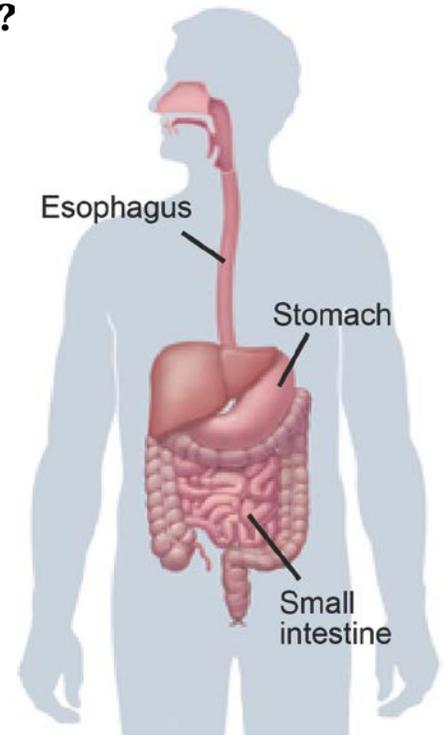
We may also ask you to swallow baking soda crystals (*fizzies*) with liquid. These will create gas in your stomach, which helps the lining of your GI tract show more clearly in the X-ray images. This is called an *air-contrast* or *double-contrast* upper GI exam.

After you swallow the barium, the radiologist will use a *fluoroscope* to watch the barium flow through your upper GI tract. The fluoroscope shows live pictures on a monitor. Still X-rays are also taken.

How do I prepare?

Be sure to tell your provider about:

- Any recent illnesses or other medical conditions.
- Any allergies you have to medicines, especially if you have ever had an allergic reaction to contrast (X-ray dye).



The upper GI tract includes the esophagus, stomach, and first part of the small intestine.

- *Women:* Tell your provider if there is any chance you are pregnant. Your provider will give you more details on preparing for your exam as needed.

The Night Before

- You may eat your evening meal as usual.
- 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.
- It is OK to take your prescribed medicines with small sips of water.

How is the exam done?

- We will ask you to:
 - Remove jewelry, glasses, and any metal objects that could affect the X-ray images
 - Put on a hospital gown
- A radiology technologist will help you get into position on an exam table. The technologist will then take an X-ray. This is done to get a “baseline” image of your GI tract before you drink the barium or take the fizzies.
- We may then ask you to take the fizzies with liquid.
- The technologist will again help you get into position. We will then ask you to drink a cup of liquid barium, which is like a thin milkshake.
- The radiologist will use the fluoroscope to watch the barium as it moves into your esophagus and stomach.
- Once your upper GI tract is coated with the barium, X-rays are taken.
- The exam usually takes less than 30 minutes.

What will I feel during the exam?

- Liquid barium has a chalky taste. It may have added flavors, such as strawberry, cherry, or vanilla.
- If you take 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 stomach helps make the pictures more detailed.

- You will first stand up, then lie down, as the radiologist takes X-rays of your esophagus and stomach.
- You will need to hold your breath 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 and takes images.

What happens after the exam?

- You will be asked 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 after your exam to help move the barium out of your body.
- Your stools may appear gray or white for 48 to 72 hours after your exam as your body clears the barium from your system.
- The barium can make it hard for you to move your bowels. If you do not have a bowel movement for more than 2 days after your exam, or you cannot pass gas, call your doctor **right away**.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

Most patients have an upper GI exam because their primary care provider (*referring doctor*) has ordered it. A radiologist who is trained to interpret upper GI exams will review your images and send a report to your provider. The radiologist will talk with you briefly about your X-ray images.

Your own provider will give you your 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