

## Esophagram

### *How to prepare and what to expect*

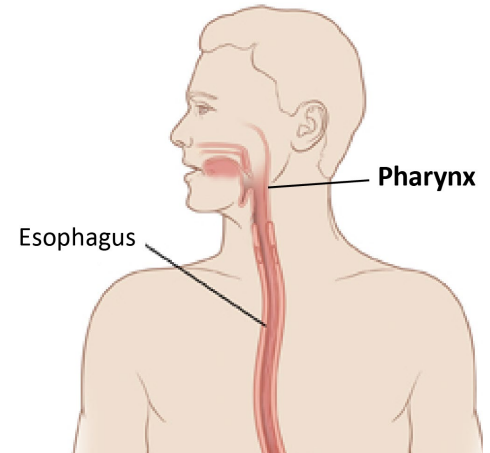
*This handout explains how an esophagram works, how to prepare, what to expect, and how to get your results.*



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### What is an esophagram?

An *esophagram* studies your swallowing process and how well your esophagus is working. The esophagus is the tube that carries food from your mouth to your stomach.



### How does the exam work?

We will ask you to swallow a liquid *contrast agent* called *barium*. This liquid is thick like a milkshake.

*The pharynx and esophagus are part of the upper digestive system.*

The barium will coat the inside of your esophagus. When you swallow the barium, the radiologist will use a *fluoroscope* to watch it flow through your esophagus. The barium will appear bright white on the X-rays and show clear details of the esophagus.

We may also ask you to swallow crystals with water. This creates gas and helps improve the images. This is called an *air-contrast* or *double-contrast esophagram*.

### How do I prepare?

- Tell your radiology provider about:
  - Recent illnesses or other health issues.
  - Allergies you may have to contrast or other medications.
- Tell your radiology provider if there is any chance you are pregnant.

## **The Night Before Your Exam**

- You may eat your evening meal as usual.

## **Exam Day**

Starting 6 hours before your esophagram:

- Do **not** eat or drink anything.
- Do **not** smoke or chew gum.
- It is OK to take your prescribed medicines with small sips of water.
- Before the exam, tell the technologist if there is any chance you may be pregnant.
- Before the exam begins, we will ask you to:
  - Change into a gown.
  - Jewelry, glasses, and any metal objects.

## **How is the exam done?**

- The technologist will tell you how the exam will happen.
- The exam should take about 30 minutes.
- We will ask you to drink a cup of liquid barium, which is like a thin, berry-flavored milkshake. It may taste a little chalky.
- You will first stand up, then lie down, as the radiologist takes X-rays of your esophagus.
- The technologist will help you get into position on an exam table.
- The radiologist will use the fluoroscope to watch your esophagus as you swallow. We will take images as the barium coats the lining of your esophagus.
- The technologist will help place you in various positions during the exam so we can view your esophagus from different angles.
- We may ask you to drink more barium during the exam.
- You may hear noise when the fluoroscope moves and takes images.

## **What will I feel during the exam?**

- An esophagram should not cause any discomfort.

## What happens after the exam?

- We will ask you to wait while the radiologist reviews the pictures for quality. We will do more X-rays if needed. If the images are clear, you may leave the exam room and get dressed.
- You can resume eating as usual and take your medicines unless your primary care provider (PCP) tells you otherwise.
- For the next 3 days, drink 4 to 8 glasses of water a day (32 to 64 ounces). This will help clear the barium from your body.
- Your stool may appear gray or white for 48 to 72 hours after your exam as your body clears the barium from your system.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or caffeine after your exam, since they can cause hard stools (constipation). If you do drink alcohol or caffeine, you must also drink extra water.
- If you have constipation, take a stool softener or a laxative.
- If you have not had a bowel movement for more than 2 days after your exam, or if you cannot pass gas, **call your doctor right away.**

### Questions?

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

If you have questions, call:

- UWMC - Montlake:**  
206.598.6200
- UWMC - Northwest:**  
206.668.2073
- Harborview Medical Center:** 206.744.3105

For scheduling, call:

- UWMC - Montlake:**  
206.598.6211
- UWMC - Northwest:**  
206.598.6211
- Harborview Medical Center:**  
206.744.3105

## Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

The radiologist will talk with you briefly about your X-ray images. A radiologist who is trained to interpret esophagrams will do a full review of your images and send a report to your PCP or referring provider.

Your PCP or referring provider will give you your exam results. They will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

You may also read your results on your MyChart page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call Radiology Records at 206.598.6206.