

## Pharyngogram

### *What to expect and how to prepare*

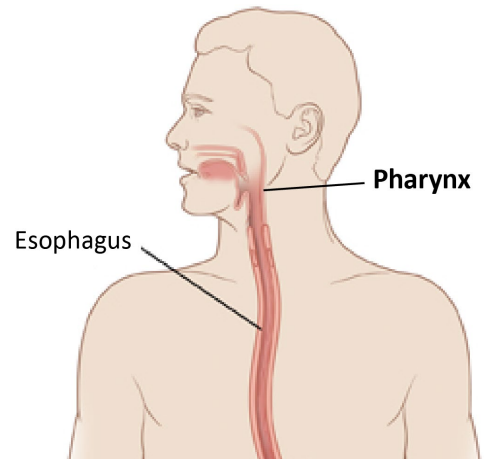
*This handout explains how a pharyngogram works, how to prepare, what to expect, and how to get your results.*



*Scan this QR code with your phone camera for a digital copy of this handout.*

### What is a pharyngogram?

A *pharyngogram* is an X-ray exam. It uses a *fluoroscope* to study your throat (*pharynx*) and your ability to swallow. A fluoroscope is an X-ray machine that shows live pictures on a monitor.



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

### How does it work?

We will ask you to swallow a liquid *contrast agent* called *barium*. The barium will coat the inside of your pharynx to

help the radiologist see how your pharynx is working. When you swallow the barium, the radiologist will use the fluoroscope to watch it flow through your pharynx. The barium will appear bright white on the X-rays and show clear details of the pharynx.

### How do I prepare?

Most patients have this exam because their primary care provider (PCP) has ordered it. Your PCP will explain how to prepare for your exam, as needed.

Be sure to tell your PCP:

- If you have had any recent illnesses or other health issues
- About any allergies you have to medicines
- If you have ever had a reaction to contrast that contains iodine

- Tell your provider if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if there is any chance you could be pregnant.

### **The Night Before**

You may eat your evening meal as usual.

### **Exam Day**

Starting 6 hours before your pharyngogram:

- 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.

### **What can I expect?**

- The exam will take about 30 minutes.
- We will ask you to change into a hospital gown.
- We will ask you to remove jewelry, metal, and any plastic objects that could show up on the X-ray images.

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

- The technologist will explain the exam.
- You will first stand up, then lie down, as the radiologist takes X-rays of your pharynx and esophagus.
- We will ask you to move into different positions while you are standing.
- A technologist will help you get into position on the exam table.
- 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.
- The radiologist will use the fluoroscope to watch your pharynx as you swallow. We will take images as the barium coats the lining of your pharynx.
- We may ask you to drink more barium during the exam.
- If your doctor asked for a “video swallow study,” a speech therapist will be present for your exam. They will give you different textures of barium and watch how your pharynx responds to each one.
- You may hear noise when the fluoroscope moves and takes images.

## What will I feel during the exam?

- A pharyngogram 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 PCP tells you otherwise.
- **For the next 3 days**, drink 4 to 8 glasses of water a day. This will help clear the barium from 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.
- 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 are prone to constipation, take a stool softener or laxative.
- Call your doctor **right away** if:
  - You become constipated or cannot pass gas.

### 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 pharyngograms will do a full review of your images and send a report to your PCP or referring provider.

Your own PCP will give you your exam results. You and your PCP 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.