

## Barium Enema

A barium enema is an x-ray exam of the colon, also called the large intestine. This sheet will tell you how to get ready for and what to expect during the exam.

### Getting Ready

Your prep kit contains:

- A packet of Magnesium Citrate
- Four Bisacodyl tablets
- One Bisacodyl suppository

### The day before your exam

Start your prep at breakfast the day before your scheduled exam. Follow these instructions carefully to get the best results and to avoid having to do the prep again. People respond differently to laxatives so stay near a bathroom once you start.

- Breakfast** Clear liquid soup (any broth); strained fruit juices without pulp; flavored gelatin that is not red (do not add anything to the gelatin); soft drinks, black coffee or plain tea (do not use milk, cream, or non-dairy creamer).
- Noon** Clear liquid soup (any broth); strained fruit juices without pulp; flavored gelatin that is not red (do not add anything to the gelatin); soft drinks, black coffee or plain tea (do not use milk, cream, or non-dairy creamer).
- 1:00 p.m.** Drink one full 8 ounce glass of water.
- 2:00 p.m.** Drink one full 8 ounce glass of water.
- 3:00 p.m.** Drink one full 8 ounce glass of water.
- 4:00 p.m.** Drink one full 8 ounce glass of water.
- 5:00 p.m.** Clear liquid soup (any broth); strained fruit juices without pulp; flavored gelatin that is not red (do not add anything to the gelatin); soft drinks, black coffee or plain tea (do not use milk, cream, or non-dairy creamer).
- 5:30 p.m.** *Slowly* add about half of the contents of the packet to 8 ounces of cold water in a large glass (holding at least 16 ounces). Stir gently. When fizzing stops, *slowly* add the rest of the packet contents to the glass. Stir gently, wait until the fizzing stops and drink the entire contents of the glass. This usually produces bowel movement in 30 minutes to 6 hours.
- 6:00 p.m.** Drink one full 8 ounce glass of water.
- 7:00 p.m.** Drink one full 8 ounce glass of water.
- 7:30 p.m.** Peel the backing off the packet of tablets and remove the four tablets. Take all four tablets with an 8 ounce glass of water. **Do not chew the tablets.** They usually produce bowel movement in 6 to 12 hours.
- 8:00 p.m.** Drink one full 8 ounce glass of water.
- 9:00 p.m.** Drink one full 8 ounce glass of water. Do not eat anything after 9:00 p.m.

(over)

**The day of your exam – do not eat or drink anything.**

At least two hours before your appointment unwrap the suppository. While lying on your side with your thigh raised, insert the suppository into your rectum and gently push it in as far as possible. Try to keep it in place for at least 15 minutes, even if the urge is strong. Bowel movement usually occurs within 15 to 60 minutes.

If you have a colostomy or an ileostomy you will do the same prep except you will not take the suppository.

Take your morning medications with a small sip of water. *If you have diabetes*, call the Radiology Department at (612) 467-2969 for instructions.

**During the Examination**

During the exam, an enema tip will be put into your rectum. The doctor will then give you an enema using a fluid called barium sulfate. Air may also be pumped into your bowel. The doctor will ask you to move in different positions and hold your breath while some x-ray pictures are taken. It is important that you remain still and hold your breath when told to do so. Any motion will show up on the films, making them unclear. During the exam, the doctor will press on your stomach. This gives a better view of your colon. If this hurts, please tell the doctor that you are uncomfortable.

You will have a feeling of fullness similar to the urge to have a bowel movement. It is extremely important that you hold on to the enema fluid (barium), otherwise, the exam will not work and your doctors will not be able to diagnose your problem. After the doctor is finished, the x-ray technologist will take a few more x-rays.

**After the Examination**

It is very important to drink a lot of water after this exam. This helps remove any remaining barium from your colon. You may return to your usual diet.

You may take up to 2 ounces of Milk of Magnesia if you are constipated.

If you have any other problems, please tell your doctor or nurse or call Urgent Care at (612) 467-2771.

Content approval: Radiology Service

June 1985

Revised August 1989, September 1991

Reviewed September 1993

Revised March 1996, May 1998, Revised July 2001

Reviewed July 2003

Revised May 2005

VA Medical Center  
Minneapolis, Minnesota