Barium enema with preparation

What is a barium enema?
A barium enema is an investigation of the large bowel. The results of this investigation will help your doctor to make a diagnosis and/or plan necessary treatment.

Do I have to do anything before I come?
To ensure success it is very important that your bowel is as clean as possible. Please follow the instructions set out below very carefully.

**Preparation instructions**

If you are taking iron tablets or any medication containing iron, stop this **5 days** before you are due to come for the examination.

If you are taking any constipating medicines such as Codeine, Lomotil, Kaolin and Morphine, Loperamide (Imodium), Regulan, or Fybogel stop this **2 days** before you are due to come for the examination. It is important for you to continue all other medications and any laxatives you usually take until you come to hospital.

**Two days before the examination**
Stop eating meat, fish, poultry, fruit and vegetables. You can eat: white bread, cereals (not bran flakes), pasta, spaghetti, rice, eggs, cheese and tinned spaghetti in tomato sauce.

**On the day before the examination**
STOP ALL FOOD. Start a fluid only diet which may include black tea, black coffee, water, fruit squash, Oxo, Bovril, Marmite, stock cubes, Lucozade, lemonade, clear soups (consommés) and jellies. **DO NOT** have milk or any drinks containing milk.

**ALSO ON THE DAY BEFORE THE EXAMINATION TAKE THE PICOLAX.**

**First Sachet**  Take in the morning **no later than 8.00am**. Dissolve the powder contained in 1 of the sachets in a little water (2 - 3 dessert spoons) in a tumbler. The solution will become hot. Wait for about 5 minutes and then dilute the solution with cold water to make about half a tumbler, stir and drink the mixture.

**Second Sachet**  Prepare and take as above **between 2.00pm and 4.00pm on the same day**. It is important to drink at least 1,500ml (3 pints) of clear fluids during the day. Try to drink at least 1 tumbler every hour. You may get a headache if you haven’t drunk enough fluid. Alcohol is best avoided.

**Be prepared for frequent bowel movements.**

**On the day of your examination**
Continue the fluid only diet and come to hospital at the time shown on your appointment letter.
It is important that you carry out these instructions as the success of the examination depends on your bowel being as clean as possible. If it is not, the examination may have to be repeated.

Ignore the treatment plan on the preparatory Picolax patient information leaflet as we have found that results following this diet are unsatisfactory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diabetic patients only</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two days before the examination</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Take your diabetic tablets/insulin as normal.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The day before the examination</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Insulin-dependant/treated patients:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Follow the diet instructions but you will need to adjust your insulin dose due to the reduced food intake.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Remember we are trying to prevent hypoglycaemia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• We suggest you take ½ your dose of insulin on the day of the examination as the fluid diet may contain sugary drinks. For further advice please contact the Diabetes Unit on 01332 787676.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tablet controlled diabetes:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Follow the diet instructions but do <strong>not</strong> take your tablets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remember we are trying to prevent hypoglycaemia.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>On the day of the examination</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• On the morning of the examination a light breakfast is suggested (1 slice of white bread, toasted or plain, with black tea/coffee. Again this enables administration of either tablets or insulin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remember that we are trying to prevent hypoglycaemia.</td>
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**Do I need to bring anything with me?**
PLEASE bring a dressing gown if you have one and DO NOT bring unnecessary money or items of value.

**How long will it take?**
The actual examination will take approximately 30 minutes but you are advised to be prepared to spend 1 hour in the X-Ray Department.
What happens during a barium enema?
You will firstly be asked to change into an examination gown and your dressing gown.

Once in the x-ray room you will be asked to lie on your left side on the x-ray table.

A small, flexible tube will be inserted into your back passage to allow barium and a small amount of air to be introduced into the bowel by the radiologist or radiographer. (You may also be given a small injection in your arm to relax the bowel).

The progress of the barium is watched on a TV screen and a number of x-ray films will be taken. You will need to move into a different position for each film.

When all the x-rays have been taken the tube will then be removed and you will be shown to a nearby toilet.

Do not be afraid to ask the radiologist or radiographer if you have any queries.

What are side-effects and risks associated with this procedure?
As with any procedure there is a small chance of side-effects or complications.

Your stools may be paler than usual for the next few days - this is nothing to be alarmed about. It is just the barium passing through your system.

Barium is harmless. It can cause a little constipation but this can be avoided by drinking plenty of fluid for the rest of the day after your investigation.

If the radiologist or radiographer gave you an injection you may have blurred vision for about 20 minutes. If this happens DO NOT attempt to drive until you can see clearly. The injection may result in a small bruise at the injection site.

There is a tiny risk of making a small hole in the bowel, a perforation. This may require treatment with antibiotics or occasionally surgery and whilst very rare can be life threatening.

All x-ray procedures involve some exposure to radiation and so pose a degree of risk. Everyone is exposed to natural background radiation from the environment throughout their lives. One in 3 people will develop cancer at some point in their lives due to many various causes including environmental radiation. Radiation from a medical test involving x-rays can add very slightly to this risk. The length and level of exposure to radiation from x-rays in medical procedures is very strictly controlled and is kept to the minimum amount possible.

For this examination you will be exposed to an amount of radiation similar to that which you would receive naturally from the environment over a period of 3 years. However, the added risk of cancer due to this radiation is extremely small. Your doctor has determined that the risk of missing a potentially serious disorder by not having this investigation is considerably greater.

This procedure will only be carried out with your verbal consent. If you are concerned about any of these risks or have any questions, please speak to your consultant.
Are there any alternatives?
Your consultant has recommended this procedure as being the best option.

However, the alternative to this procedure is a colonoscopy. If you would like more information about this, please speak to the consultant caring for you.

There is also the option of not having this procedure at all. The consequence of not having the procedure is not finding the cause of your symptoms. If you would like more information please speak to the consultant caring for you.

After the examination
Once the examination is completed you may return to your normal diet. You should drink plenty of fluids for the next 24 hours to help avoid constipation.

If your vision becomes blurred, do not drive until you can see clearly.

Please note: Barium is a dense substance, which may not be completely cleared from your toilet by normal flushing. It may be necessary to use a toilet brush, or to flush more than once to clear any residue from the toilet.

When will I get the results?
The x-rays need to be developed and examined so we will not be able to give you the results straight away. The radiographer will advise you when and where to receive your results.

Student training
A student radiographer may be present during your examination. If you would prefer them not to attend please let the radiographer know at the start of your examination.

Special needs
If you have any special needs which are likely to affect your examination please contact the X-Ray Department.

If you have any queries, or require further information please see your appointment letter for a contact telephone number.

NHS Direct is a 24 hour nurse led, confidential service providing general health care advice and information.
Telephone 0845 4647 or visit the website at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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