

Esophagram or Barium Swallow



What is an Esophagram?

The esophagram or barium swallow is a test whereby a patient is instructed to drink a barium sulfate compound that enables the radiologist to study the function and appearance of the esophagus and assess the swallowing process.

CPT Code

74220

Indications

The esophagram can assess symptoms of painful or difficult swallowing, bloodstained vomit, abdominal pain and weight loss. The radiologist is able to detect narrowing or irritation of the esophagus, blockages, hiatal hernia, or abnormally enlarged veins that may cause bleeding in the esophagus, ulcers, polyps, or tumor.

Contraindications

Pregnancy. Known or suspected esophageal perforation.

What Happens During the Test?

There is no preparation required for the exam. Our technologist will obtain a medical history from your patient. Your patient will be given a cup of barium to drink while the radiologist watches and evaluates the swallowing process using fluoroscopy. As the barium coats the lining of the esophagus, images are taken to track the pathway to the stomach. The patient may be placed in various positions during the exam.

The procedure takes approximately 10 minutes to perform.

After the Exam

Ensure that your patient drinks sufficient fluids to eliminate the barium. Following the procedure, he may resume normal activities.

The Results

A radiologist will analyze the images and send a signed report to the referring physician within 1 business day.

(Information adapted from Web MD and Dr. Paul Keller)

This manual is intended for use as merely a guideline for referring physicians and their staff only. It contains information pertaining to the most commonly ordered exams and indications. However, Iowa Radiology does not recommend any particular examination. Individual radiologist preference or patient circumstances may dictate ordering alternative studies. Although contrast codes are not needed to place an order, the following contrast codes may be used in placing orders: CT Contrast Q9967, MRI contrast A9577 and A9579.