

Having a gastro-intestinal bleeding study

Your doctor has recommended that you have a gastro-intestinal bleeding study. This is a nuclear medicine test. A scan is taken to check to see if you are bleeding from the gastro-intestinal tract.

What is nuclear medicine?

Nuclear medicine helps doctors to check how well different parts of your body are working. A small amount of a radioactive substance (tracer) is given, usually by injection into a vein. The tracer gives off gamma rays, so we can measure the distribution of that tracer in your body. This measurement is usually done using a gamma camera, although occasionally blood samples may be needed.

Is there any risk from the radiation?

We will expose you to ionising radiation when we carry out this examination. We are all exposed to ionising radiation from naturally occurring sources such as cosmic rays, certain types of soil and rocks and even food we eat. Ionising radiation can cause cell damage that in turn, after many years, may turn cancerous. The radiation associated with your exam will therefore carry a small risk which is less than 0.1%. This risk will be far outweighed by the benefits of having this exposure. We will also tailor the amount of radiation we use to you.

Please read the *Important points* section below. If you have any concerns, please contact us.

What preparation do I need for my gastro-intestinal bleeding study?

You must not eat or drink from midnight prior to your appointment. You can continue to take any medication that has been prescribed for you by your doctor. It is also safe for you to take 'over the counter' medicines.

How is my gastro-intestinal bleeding study carried out?

When you arrive at the department, you will be given a small injection of a substance called stannous medronate through a needle, directly into one of your veins. This substance will circulate through your body, preparing your red blood cells for the next injection.

About 30 minutes later you will be given a second injection containing the radioactive tracer. The second injection has to be given into a different vein. This may be through a 'butterfly' (a small needle with a plastic tube attached to one end) or possibly an existing cannula (not a skin-tunnelled catheter). The two injections have to be given into separate veins in this way to achieve an accurate result.

Once the radioactive tracer has been injected we can start the scan. You will not need to remove any clothes for the scan but you will have to remove any metal objects (such as jewellery) from



your pockets. We will ask you to lie on your back on the scanning couch for the scans to be taken. The scans will take about one hour. There may be further scans required and these will be discussed with each individual patient. You may need to return to the department the following day.

Are there any side effects?

Neither of the injections that we give you will produce any side effects. You can continue with your usual daily activities. In particular, they will not make you drowsy and so will not prevent you from driving a car.

What happens after my gastro-intestinal bleeding study?

You should expect to be at the department for two to three hours. Once your gastro-intestinal bleeding study is completed, you may leave the department immediately. You will be able to eat and drink as normal. You may go anywhere you wish, but we ask you to avoid prolonged close contact with pregnant individuals and children for the rest of the day. This is to avoid exposing children to unnecessary radiation.

How will I get the results of my gastro-intestinal bleeding study?

Your gastro-intestinal bleeding study will be reported on by the nuclear medicine consultant within 48 hours of completion. The results of your test will then be made available to the doctor who referred you.

Important points

- Due to the nature of these investigations, we advise that **you should not be accompanied by anyone who is pregnant and should not bring young children to the department**. With most of these investigations the level of radioactivity will have decreased to a safe level by the time you arrive home after the scan. However, some investigations need more specific restrictions with regards to contact with young children and these will be explained.
- We are committed to ensuring patients are free from discrimination regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. If your gender was female at birth and you are transgender or non-binary, please inform a member of staff as we legally need to rule out the possibility of pregnancy before we can go ahead with some of our examinations. This information will not be recorded or shared without your consent.
- If you are afraid of needles you can ask for a spray to numb the area, before your injection.
- If you are **pregnant or breastfeeding**, please contact the department as soon as possible to find out if you can have this test. Generally, nuclear medicine tests are not carried out on pregnant individuals unless absolutely necessary and then the dose of radioactivity will probably be reduced.

Contact details

If you have any queries or further questions, please contact us:

Sutton: 020 8661 3286 / 3287

Chelsea: 020 7811 8541

Email: rmh-tr.rmuclearmedicine@nhs.net



Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

020 8915 6899

