

X-ray examination of swallowing (videofluoroscopy)

You have been given an appointment to attend the videofluoroscopy swallowing clinic which is co-ordinated by the speech and language therapists (SLT) and run jointly with the x-ray department. A videofluoroscopy is a moving x-ray to assess swallowing. This factsheet provides information about the clinic.

Why do I need a videofluoroscopy?

You may be having swallowing difficulties because of surgery, radiotherapy or other treatments you have received. You may be recommended to have this procedure before you start your treatments to allow the SLT to complete a baseline assessment to plan your future rehabilitation. SLTs are trained to assess and treat swallowing problems. The videofluoroscopy examination enables the SLT to assess your swallowing in detail. It also enables us to try different foods, drinks and techniques to help improve your swallow.

Can I eat before my appointment?

Unless you have been advised otherwise, you can eat and drink as usual before your appointment. If you are currently feeding through a tube, you can take your feeds as normal.

What happens during the videofluoroscopy?

The procedure is conducted by a SLT and a radiographer (a healthcare professional who specialises in taking x-rays). It is carried out in the x-ray room. We will ask you to stand or sit on a platform in the x-ray room while we adjust the x-ray machine around you. During the assessment we will give you different consistencies of food and drink mixed with an x-ray contrast, either barium or a water-soluble contrast. This will slightly alter the taste of the food and drinks but allows them to show up on the x-ray. While you swallow, the x-ray will record and allow the SLT to see what is happening in your mouth and throat. This is digitally recorded and stored securely so the SLT can study it in detail at a later time. It will form part of your medical records. If you have any food allergies or restriction in your diet, this will be accommodated.

How long will it take?

The appointment will be approximately 45 minutes, although the procedure takes approximately 10–25 minutes. Although the clinic generally runs on time, you may experience a short delay. Your patience in these circumstances would be appreciated.

What happens afterwards?

You can return to the ward or go home immediately after the appointment, as there are no side effects from the procedure. If appropriate, a follow up appointment will be made for you to see the SLT. This is to discuss the results in more detail and to give you further advice and/or exercises to make your swallowing easier.



When will I know the results?

The SLT will be able to give you some basic information and advice immediately after the procedure. However, detailed results will only be available when a report has been written. The SLT will write the report after viewing the recorded images. The report will be sent to your consultant and GP, and a copy will be kept in your medical notes.

Is the procedure safe?

- The procedure is painless
- Due to your difficulties swallowing, there is a small risk that food or drink may go into your airway during the x-ray. The risk is low, as you are given small amounts of food and drink and monitored closely. If this happens, the SLT will advise you how to reduce any risk.
- 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 very small risk which is less than 0.01%. 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.
- The barium contrasts can cause your stools to become white; this is short term. You are advised to drink plenty of water after your videofluoroscopy. More serious effects and/or allergic reactions can occur (rarely or uncommon). If you feel unwell after your appointment, please contact your GP or your local emergency department.

What will happen if I choose not to have the procedure?

Your therapist will discuss with you why a videofluoroscopy has been recommended. If you choose not to have the procedure, it means we are unable to advise you on different foods, drinks, techniques or therapy that could help improve your swallowing.

Is there an alternative procedure?

There is another procedure your SLT may discuss with you (Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing [FEES]). This is a useful assessment, but it provides different information about your swallowing to a videofluoroscopy and may not be appropriate for you.

Consent

We will ask for your consent to use the anonymised images for teaching of healthcare professionals and students. You may however decline for your images to be used for this purpose; this will not affect your care or treatment.

Contact details

If you have any questions about this procedure, you can either speak to the staff when you attend for your videofluoroscopy or call the SLT team, Monday to Friday, on:

Chelsea	020 7808 2815
Sutton	020 8661 3038

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

