

Barium enema

i Information for patients Radiology



What is a barium enema?

A barium enema is a procedure that enables the doctors to see your large bowel (colon) using an X-ray machine to take pictures.

Barium is a white chalky liquid which allows us to examine your bowel using X-rays. The barium liquid is poured into your bowel through a rubber enema tube and then drained off to leave behind a coating of barium on your bowel wall. X-ray pictures are taken with you laying and standing in different positions in order that the whole of the large bowel can be seen. You will be given a small injection of a medicine called Buscapan, this relaxes your bowel and makes the procedure easier to do.

Why do I need it?

You will have recently seen a consultant or GP because you have had some problems with your bowels. Some reasons for having a barium enema test are:

- changes to your bowel habit
- blood or mucous in your stools
- weight loss
- abdominal pain

The barium enema will allow the doctors to see if there are any problems with your large bowel.

Are there any risks?

There are very few risks involved in having a barium enema. However, the risks include:

Constipation

This tends to be more of a problem if you are older. You can reduce the effects of this if you eat plenty of fruit and vegetables and drink lots of fluid in the few days before the procedure. If the constipation continues for more than a couple of days after the procedure you might need to take a mild laxative, which you can buy over the counter, for example senna based products. If you do need to take laxatives and are taking the oral contraceptive pill, remember that the diarrhoea caused by taking the laxatives may make the pill less effective; therefore we advise that you take extra precautions until your next period.

Reaction to the injection

These are rare and generally very mild and usually only last 15 - 20 minutes. They include a dry mouth, blurred vision, dizziness, constipation, and very rarely urine retention.

Allergic reaction

A much rarer side effect is an allergic reaction to the barium liquid. Such reactions have included migraine and a skin rash. If this occurs while you are in the Radiology department we will be able to advise you what to do, but if it occurs when you are at home you should see your GP.

Bowel perforation

Perforation of the bowel is a more serious, but very rare complication. The pressure from the barium or air could cause a weakened section of the bowel to break open, allowing the intestinal contents to spill into the abdominal cavity. It may occur in people whose bowel wall has been weakened by intestinal problems, such as inflammatory bowel diseases, ulcerative colitis, or Crohn's disease. If symptoms of abdominal pain persist or get worse after you go home you should seek advice from your GP.

Although the above are recognised risks associated with having a barium enema, at this hospital we carry out about 15 barium enemas each week and we haven't heard of many of our patients having anything apart from bloating due to wind.

Consent

We must seek your consent for any procedure or treatment beforehand. Staff will explain the risks, benefits and alternatives where relevant before they ask for your consent. If you are unsure about any aspect of the procedure proposed, please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

What do I need to do to prepare for the procedure?

Your bowel should be completely empty for this procedure as any faeces make it difficult to see the bowel properly and may make the test more difficult to interpret. So please use the laxatives and follow the diet sheet we give you so that you empty your bowel.

If you are diabetic you should inform the Radiology staff and we will make your appointment as early in the morning as possible and give you special instructions to ensure that your blood sugars remain stable prior to and after the procedure. You should bring your medications and a light snack so that you can have something to eat and your diabetic tablets or insulin as soon as the test is complete.

If you are diabetic and have concerns about this procedure, please telephone the Radiology department so that you can discuss your worries with a member of the staff.

Women who are still having periods should have this procedure during the 10 days after the start of their menstrual period. (Your menstrual period includes the time that you are menstruating). A suitable appointment will be negotiated with you.



We do not do this procedure for women who are pregnant. If you are, or suspect that you are, pregnant please telephone us on:

0114 226 8000

and discuss this with one of the nursing staff.

Low residue diet

You will need to only eat foods from this diet sheet the day before your appointment. You will have received details in your letter.

Low residue foods pass through your bowel quickly once you start to take your laxatives. This helps clear your bowel well and produces much better results.

Avoid high fibre foods such as bran, fruit and vegetables for this time.

Choose food from the following list:

Fats

Butter / margarine / low fat spreads / milk / cheese

Eggs

Boiled, poached, scrambled

Cereal

Cornflakes, crisped rice

Avoid cereals with bran

Potatoes

Skin removed

Boiled, mashed, chipped or baked

Pasta

Any plain pasta, such a spaghetti, macaroni, lasagna

Rice

Plain, boiled/steamed white rice

Meat/Fish/Shellfish

Well cooked

Gravy and sauces

Bread

White bread / toast

Dessert

Milk pudding, custard, clear jelly

Avoid fruit

Drinks

Water, energy drinks, soda water, tea and coffee, fizzy drinks, squashes, herbal tea, clear soup, bovril

Avoid fruit juice.

What do I do when I arrive?

Your appointment letter will indicate which hospital you should go to for your procedure. *(See maps at end of this leaflet)*

A member of the Radiology staff will collect you from the waiting area and show you to a changing cubicle where you can remove your clothes and put on a hospital gown. We ask you to change so that you don't get barium on your clothes. If you need help changing please ask the assistant.

The assistant will stay with you throughout the procedure so that he or she can help you to get on and off the X-ray table and explain things as they happen.

What happens during the procedure?

Firstly, we will take you into the X-ray room where your radiologist or radiographer will check all your details and ask you a few questions about your health. This is done to make sure that you are well enough to go through with the barium enema. They will also explain what is going to happen during the procedure.

For the procedure we will ask you to lie down on the X-ray table on your left-hand side. This will position you correctly to allow the radiographer to insert the lubricated enema tube into your rectum. We will secure the tube with some tape.

The barium mixture will be run into your bowel through the tube and your radiographer will take some pictures to ensure it has filled your entire large bowel. Once your radiographer has taken some pictures, the barium will be drained out again leaving a small coating on your bowel.

At this point we will normally give you a small injection in your arm to relax your bowel. Once this has taken effect, we will put some air into your bowel to make it easier to see on the X-rays.

So that we can see your entire large bowel during the examination, we will ask you to lie in different positions. We will also need to stand both you and the X-ray table upright so that we can take pictures of your bowel whilst you are standing.

Once all the pictures have been taken the nurse/assistant will drain off some more of the barium through the tube and then remove it.

Will it hurt?

You should feel no pain during the procedure although the rubber tube can be a little uncomfortable at first but relaxing will ease that. You may have some discomfort from the air we put into your bowel but it shouldn't be painful.

What happens after the procedure?

Once the procedure is finished, we will take you to a toilet to try to get rid of some more barium before you go home. Once you have been to the toilet and passed some more of the barium and the air, you can then change back into your own clothes. We ask that you try the toilet again once more before you go home to ensure that you will be comfortable before you leave the hospital.

How will I feel after the procedure?

After the procedure you may find that you feel very bloated due to trapped wind caused by the air that we put into your bowel. This usually settles within a few hours. However, if it is uncomfortable you may find that moving around, laying on your side and turning over from time to time may relieve the symptoms.

You may also notice barium in your stools for up to 2 weeks after the test, although you should pass most of it within the first couple of days.

When can I eat and drink normally again?

You can resume eating and drinking as normal right away, although we do ask that you drink lots of fluids, approximately 2 - 3 litres of water per day for the next few days. You should also eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables as this and the water will stop you becoming constipated.

Is there anything I should look out for when I go home?

If you have:

- any bleeding from your rectum, or
- severe abdominal pain with a high temperature

you should see your GP or attend A&E.

Who should I contact if I think there is a problem?

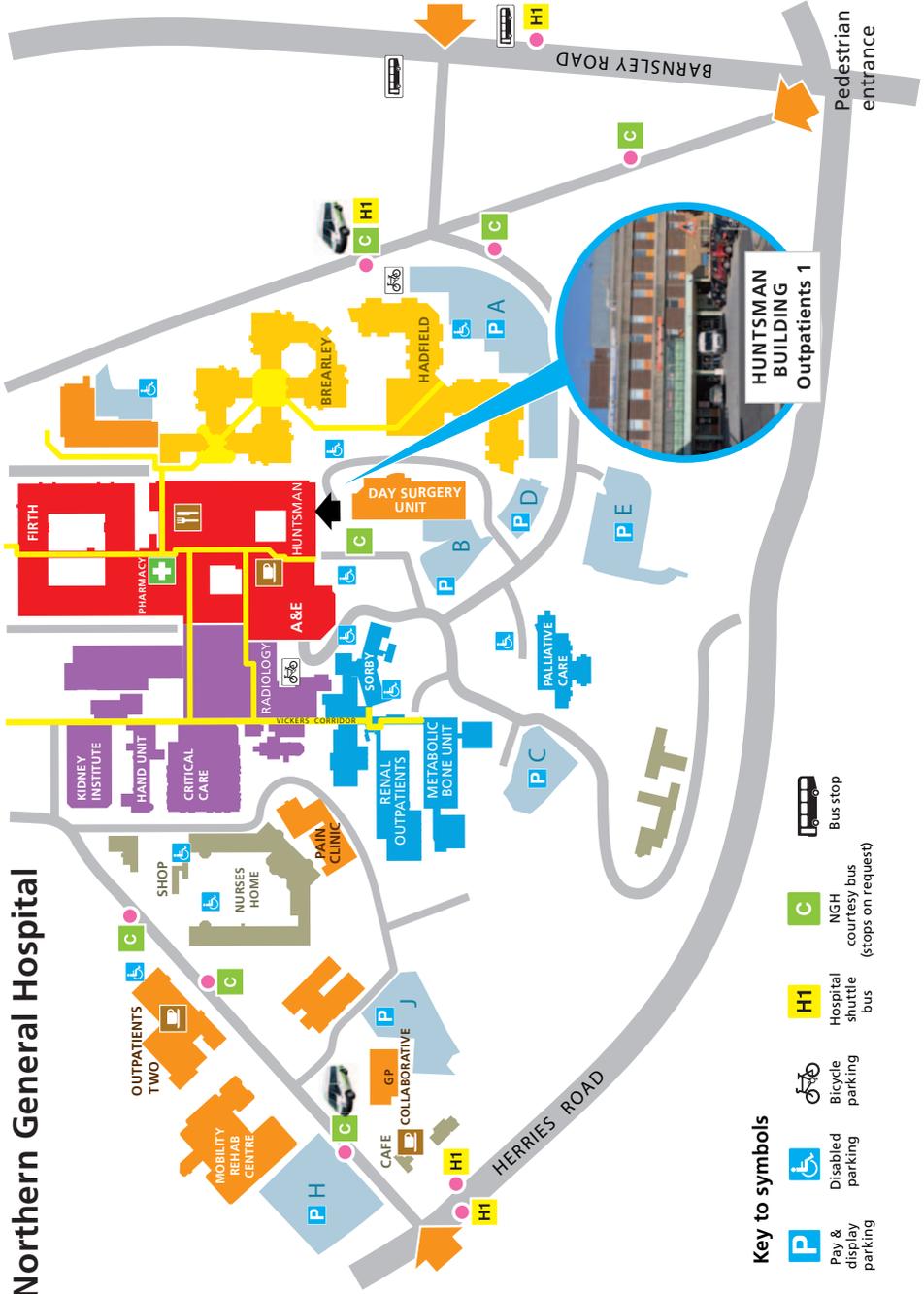
If you think there is a problem, you can contact the Radiology Department (**0114 226 8000**) or your GP for advice.

When and how will I get my results?

A radiologist and radiographer will look at the X-rays from the barium enema in detail within 2 - 3 days of your enema and then send a report to your consultant.

You should have an appointment booked with your consultant at which you can discuss the results. If you do not have an appointment to see your consultant, your consultant's secretary will send one out to you.

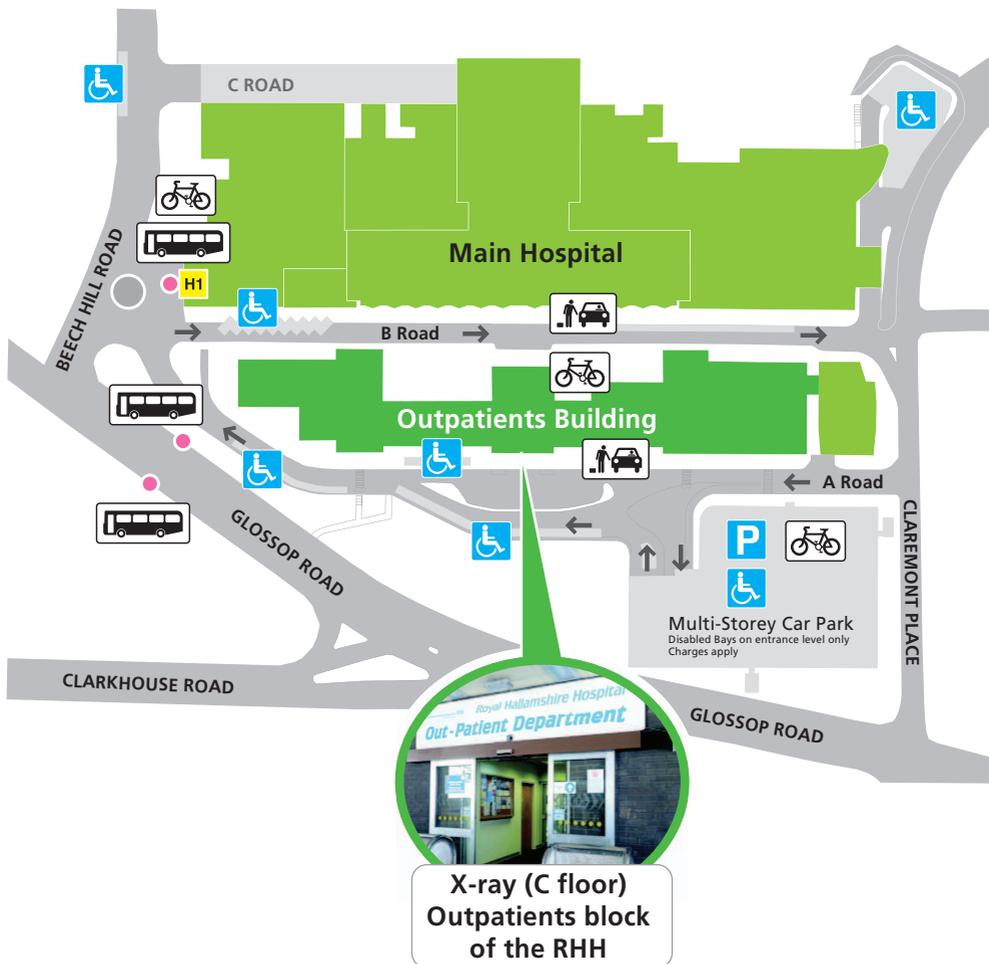
Northern General Hospital



Key to symbols

- P** Pay & display parking
- Disabled parking
- Bicycle parking
- H1** Hospital shuttle bus
- C** NGH courtesy bus (stops on request)
- Bus stop

Royal Hallamshire Hospital



**X-ray (C floor)
Outpatients block
of the RHH**

Key to symbols

- 

Pay & display parking
- 

Disabled parking
- 

Bicycle parking
- 

Hospital shuttle bus
- 

Bus stop

Where can I find more information about barium enemas?

Information is also available from NHS Choices:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/barium-enema/>

Or alternatively, you can telephone the Radiology department and ask to speak to one of the nursing or radiographer staff:

- **0114 226 8000**



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