

What to Expect From Your Barium Enema

Introduction

So you're going to have a barium enema! Relax. Though most people think a barium enema (BE) is an extreme procedure, the truth is that it's not. Rather, it is a simple fluoroscopic test used to study the large bowel, or colon. There are few complications, and you'll be able to return home or to work immediately after the procedure.

What's Involved

The procedure is simplicity itself. First, you lie face-down on the X-ray table. A technologist then inserts an enema tip into your rectum and inflates a balloon at the end of the enema tube. This causes the rectum to distend, making you feel as if you need to defecate. Knowing that this is a false sensation, you will easily be able to ignore it.

Now the radiologist opens the valve on the tube coming from the barium bag. With the introduction of the barium inside you, the feeling of urgency will increase. Continue to ignore it. Using fluoroscopy, the radiologist can now see the end of the large bowel, where the cramping occurs. This feeling should ease quickly. If it doesn't, barium may have to be expelled from the colon and the colon refilled. It may be necessary to inject glucagon, a bowel relaxant, through a 25 gauge needle into a vein in your arm.

During this time, feel free to chat with the radiologist and technologist. Maintain a positive attitude. Tell a few jokes.

The radiologist will take several "spot films" of the fluoroscopy. These

will become a part of your medical record and used to decide if surgery is necessary. And that's all!

Afterwards

The balloon will be deflated, the enema tip removed, and, after a quick trip to the bathroom, you may get dressed and resume your normal activities.

Privacy

Traditionally, such sensitive medical procedures have been held confidential between patient and doctor. The Freedom of Medical Information Act of 2014, however, changed all that. You should be aware that detailed information about your enema will be posted on the world wide web, including X-rays, photographic stills, and streaming video of the procedure from start to finish. You should be prepared for a certain amount of razzing (including, in many cases, practical jokes!) from your family and friends.

In Conclusion ?

But in the final analysis, isn't your health all that really matters?

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