

*If you have
any questions,
please ask
the speech
pathologist.*

Modified Barium Swallow Study

A modified barium swallow study is also known as a video-fluoroscopic swallow study (VFSS) or a “cookie swallow” test. The swallow study is an X-ray exam. It looks at how well food and liquid pass through your mouth and throat and down towards the stomach. The test shows how well the muscles work in your:

- Mouth
- Throat
- Upper esophagus

The results help us find the cause of your swallowing problems. Based on this, we can teach you:

- Ways to improve how you eat and swallow
- Exercises that may help improve how you swallow

During the test, the technician will take a series of video X-rays (fluoroscopy) while you eat small amounts of food and liquid of different thicknesses. Video X-rays give real-time images that show how you swallow. The amount of radiation used in this test is small. It is well within limits that are not harmful. You will have this test in the Radiology Department. It takes about 20 minutes.

Before the test

Outpatients

There is no special preparation for this test. Take your usual medications. You can eat your usual diet. If you wear dentures, it is important to wear them when you eat.

On the day of the test, arrive 15 minutes before your test time. Be sure to bring your:

- Physician’s written order for the test if you received one.
- Photo ID
- List of allergies
- List of current medications
- Medicare card (Medicare patients)
- Medical insurance information

Come to the Outpatient Radiology Desk on the 4th floor of the Galter Pavilion at 201 East Huron Street.

Patient and visitor parking is in the garage at 222 East Huron Street. This is across from the hospital’s Feinberg and Galter pavilions.

For a discounted rate, bring your parking ticket with you. You can validate your ticket at the Customer Services Desks on the 1st and 2nd floor of Feinberg and Galter pavilions.

Inpatients

If you are a patient in the hospital, your physician has ordered the swallow study based on the recommendation by the speech pathologist.

You will travel to the test on a cart or in a wheelchair. Be sure to wear your dentures if you use them when you eat.

During the test

When you arrive, tell the speech pathologist if you are pregnant. They will ask you to eat small amounts of food and drink liquid. They will take video X-rays while you do this. You will drink liquids by spoon, a syringe and a cup. The amounts will range from 1/3 teaspoon to normal-sized sips from a cup or straw. You will then eat spoonfuls of pudding and pieces of a cookie.

If you have trouble swallowing, the speech pathologist will ask you to:

- Swallow using special swallowing techniques.
- Drink thicker liquids.

Some of the food and liquids may contain barium. This lets the video X-ray show the movement of food and liquids better as you swallow.

If you cannot swallow any liquid or food, you may spit it out.

After the test

You may go back to your normal activities and recommended diet after the test. The speech pathologist will explain the test results to you right after the study. They will send the final report to your physician in 1 to 2 business days. Northwestern Medicine physicians can see the test results right away in your medical record.