

## What is a Barium Enema/Lower GI Series?

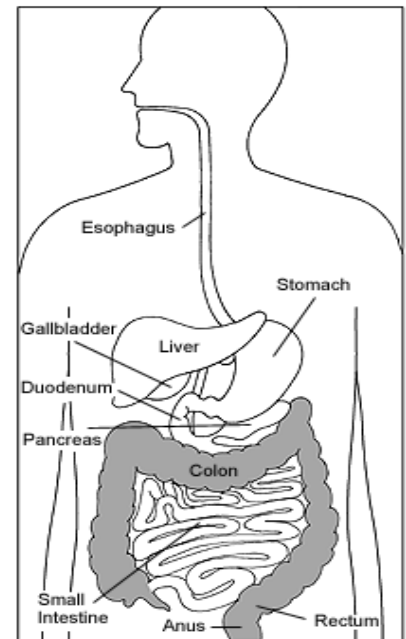
### PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

#### What is a Barium Enema/Lower GI Series?

A barium enema or lower gastrointestinal (GI) series is an x-ray examination of your lower digestive tract, which includes the large intestine (colon) and rectum. A liquid called barium, which is visible on x-rays, is put by enema into the colon so that it can be seen on x-ray images.

#### How should I prepare for my barium enema/lower GI series?

- Your doctor will provide specific instructions for a bowel preparation (medications or agents you take to cleanse the colon prior to the exam) and dietary restrictions to follow the night before the procedure.
- It is very important for your colon to be clear for the exam. Any waste material (stool) remaining in the colon can obscure the images.
- You will be asked to remove any metal items such as jewelry, eyeglasses, and clothing with zippers or snaps.
- The metal in these items will show up on the x-ray images and may obscure them.
- You should allow approximately one hour for the examination.
- For female patients, **if there is any possibility you may be pregnant or if you are breast feeding, it is important to tell this to the technologist before the procedure begins.**



Source: National Digestive Diseases Clearinghouse @ <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov>

#### How is the barium enema/lower GI series performed?

- You will be asked to remove your clothing and put on a hospital gown.
- The technologist will assist you onto the examination table and then will take a preliminary film of your abdomen to make sure that your colon appears clear.
- You will then be instructed to turn on your side and a lubricated enema tip will be inserted into your rectum.
- The radiologist will then control the flow of a liquid barium mixture into your rectum and colon, which will coat the inside of your colon, making it visible on the x-ray images. You may feel the urge to have a bowel movement. Resist this urge by taking several slow, deep breaths. The enema tip is specially made to help you hold the liquid in your intestine. If you have a problem holding it, let the technologist know.

- You will then be asked to move in different positions while the radiologist examines the colon and takes x-ray images from multiple angles.
- During the procedure, you may be asked to turn in different positions and the table may tilt slightly. You may feel some pressure applied to your abdomen.
- It is very important to hold as still as you can and to hold your breath when asked in order to make the films as clear as possible.
- After the radiologist has finished taking spot films, the technologist will then take additional images of your colon.
- You will then be escorted to a rest room to evacuate the barium. When you are finished, the technologist will take a final film with your intestines empty of barium.
- After the examination is completed, you will be asked to wait for a brief period while the radiologist checks the images to make sure all of the needed information is on the films.

### **What should I expect after my exam?**

You will pass whitish colored bowel movements for a few days after the test due to the barium. Unless you are on fluid restriction, you should drink plenty of fluids to avoid constipation. Speak with your doctor about taking a laxative if you tend to get constipated.

### **Is a barium enema/lower GI series safe?**

X-rays are a form of energy that exists in nature, emanating from outer space, rocks, and even soil. The x-ray machine produces an x-ray beam which is carefully limited to the body part being examined. No radiation remains in your body after the examination.

Female patients, **if there is any possibility you may be pregnant or if you are breast feeding, it is important to tell this to the technologist before the x-ray.**

Speak with the x-ray technologist if you have questions or concerns regarding your barium enema/lower GI series. A formal report will be sent to your doctor within days following your procedure. Your doctor will speak with you regarding the results.

Source: Virginia Radiology Associates @ [www.virginiaradiology.com](http://www.virginiaradiology.com) retrieved 3/05

*For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education*

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