

When Your Child's Having a VFSS (Videofluoroscopic Swallow Study)

What is a VFSS?

It's a video X-ray study of how food moves from the mouth towards the stomach or lungs.

What is barium sulphate?

It's a white substance that's mixed with food and liquids so they can be seen better on x-ray. It comes in a powder or liquid form and has a chalky taste. Chocolate or fruit flavours can be added.

Is the barium sulphate safe?

Yes, the barium sulphate mixture is very safe. Reactions are rare and usually mild.

Bad reactions are rare and only happen in every 1 out of every 1 million people given barium sulphate. The reactions include:

- swelling of the upper airway
- low blood pressure

While the mixture is safe, aspiration pneumonia is a risk. The doctor will speak with you about this risk.

Why does my child need a VFSS?

The study is done to check for problems with swallowing that may cause trouble with breathing or eating.

If you have questions about why your child is having the study done, be sure to talk to your doctor.

Who does the test?

The study is done by a radiologist (a doctor that specializes in reading x-rays), an occupational therapist, and a speech-language pathologist.

How long does the study take?

The study usually takes less than 5 minutes, but you'll be here for about 1 hour. The rest of the time is to get your child and food ready and talk to you about the study afterwards.

Can I stay with my child?

Yes, as we would rather you feed the child. If you can't be exposed to radiation (e.g., if you're pregnant), we ask that another person familiar with feeding your child come with you. You can watch from behind a safe window.

What do we need to do to get ready?

As we don't have food here for the study, we'll call you beforehand and ask you to bring:

- a liquid (formula, milk, or juice)
- solids your child enjoys
- solids your child finds harder to swallow
- the utensils your child uses during feeding (nipples, bottles, cups, spoons, forks)

Don't give your child anything to eat or drink for at least 2 hours before the test. We want your child to be hungry so he or she will take food during the study.

You can bring something to distract your child, such as a toy or iPad. We don't have toys here.

What happens during the study?

Your child will sit in an upright support chair (wheelchairs may not fit the equipment space). There are different ones depending on your child's size and needs.

You'll feed your child while the x-ray video is running so the team can see what's happening with the food as it moves through the mouth and down to the stomach.

What happens after the study?

Your child won't eat the whole meal during the study. He or she will be able to eat more right after the test.

Barium can sometimes cause constipation. Children who have regular bowel movements may not have a problem passing the barium. You may notice some white barium mixed with the stool. Giving your child extra fluids will help the barium pass more easily.

Depending on the results of the study, your child may need a special feeding plan. The team will first speak with your doctor. You and your doctor will make a plan together.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if your child has:

- stomach cramps
- trouble having bowel movements

What else do I need to know?

Please arrange child care if you have other children—please don't bring them with you.

There isn't much space in the room. We ask that no more than 2 adults come. If your feeding therapists would like to be there they need to contact the team before the day of the study.

Questions?

If you have questions, please speak with your doctor. When the team contacts you before the appointment, they can also answer your questions about the study.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information call Health Link at 811.

This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction, and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.