

Barium Enema Information

Your physician has referred you to Radiological Associates of Sacramento for a barium enema. A barium enema is a diagnostic X-ray examination of the colon (the large intestine) to check for colon cancer, polyps, diverticula or other abnormalities. An inert natural compound, barium sulfate, is introduced into the colon through a narrow tube placed into the rectum. Air often is put into the colon through the same tube. The barium outlines the interior surface of the colon.

While the colon is being filled, the radiologist watches on a monitor and takes X-ray images with a fluoroscopic X-ray machine. You may be asked to move into different positions to reveal all parts of your colon on the X-rays. After your colon is full and the radiologist has taken images with the fluoroscope, the technologist also will take a few additional X-rays. Your colon will feel full at this point in the exam, but unless some cramping occurs, most patients do not experience any pain. After the X-rays are checked, you will be allowed to go to the rest room.

The procedure takes 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

Women should always inform the technologist or doctor if there is any possibility that they are pregnant.

Patient preparation

For the barium enema exam to be successful, your intestines must be completely empty. It is important to follow the specific instructions of the preparation kit closely. A preparation kit is available from a RAS office or from your doctor's office. **Please inform our staff if you have a history of kidney disease.** You will need to contact your physician for a prescribed bowel preparation kit. Your physician will help you make that decision.

Side effects and complications

Patients occasionally report some mild cramping and flatulence after the exam. Report any new, severe pain to your doctor immediately.

Follow-up care

Barium sometimes causes constipation that can be corrected using an over-the-counter laxative. Drinking plenty of water will help avoid constipation.