Upper GI

Overview of Procedure

The upper GI (gastrointestinal) series is a test that uses x-rays to diagnose problems in the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum (the first part of the small intestine). A thick barium drink is given to the patient to swallow. The barium coats the lining of the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum, allowing them to show up clearly on the x-ray images. The upper GI series can demonstrate a blockage, abnormal growth, ulcer, or identify a problem with organ functioning.

The upper GI series is indicated for assessing problems such as abdominal swelling, bloating, pain, nausea, and vomiting. It may be used to detect the cause of painful or difficult swallowing. The radiologist may also find evidence of ulcers, scar tissue, abnormal growths, hiatal hernia (a defect where the upper portion of the stomach slides through the diaphragm), or blockage of the normal food path through the digestive tract.

How do I prepare for this procedure?

- If your study is scheduled before noon, have nothing to eat or drink after midnight the night before. If your study is scheduled in the afternoon, you may have a light breakfast, but nothing to eat or drink after 7:00 AM.
- You may continue taking your usual prescriptions, but please bring a list of your current medications and any medications you may be allergic to.

What to Wear

When checking in, you may be asked to change into a gown and scrub pants, depending on which area is being x-rayed. Our technologists may also ask you to remove jewelry, eyeglasses, and any metal objects that may obscure the x-ray image, because these objects can show up on an x-ray.

Contrast Material

Before some types of x-rays, you’re given a liquid called contrast medium. Contrast mediums, such as barium and iodine, help outline a specific area of your body on the x-ray image.

What can I expect during/after the procedure?

The technologist may take an initial film of the abdomen (a scout film) to make sure that the GI tract is properly prepped for the exam. You will be positioned on a table with tilting capabilities so the Radiologist or PA is able move you from a standing to a reclining position. You may be given a small cup of effervescent crystals to swallow, allowing gas to be created in the stomach for better imaging. You are then given a cup of barium and instructed to drink.

The Radiologist or PA watches the barium as it moves down your throat, into your stomach, and finally into the first portion of the small bowel with fluoroscopy (an x-ray unit combined with a TV monitor). You may be asked to move in various positions that best demonstrate the areas of interest. The approximate time for the exam is 30 to 45 minutes.
Receiving your Results

Your referring physician will receive a copy of your results within 3-5 business days after your procedure. Once your primary care physician has received your results, he/she will share them with you.

What Saint Mary’s Health Care locations offer this service?

200 Jefferson Ave SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503
Staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a week
Phone: 616-685-6200
Fax: 616-685-8993

Radiology/imaging services are located on the first floor. Please park in the main parking lot located directly in front of the main hospital, or in the parking ramp located in front of the Emergency Department. Parking is free. Enter through the front revolving doors of the hospital and stop at our Information Desk to be directed to radiology. For after-hour appointments, please enter though the Emergency Department entrance, and Security will direct you to radiology.

Additional Information

Click here for additional information on Upper GI procedures.