Esophagram (Barium Swallow)

What is an Esophagram (Barium Swallow)?
Fluoroscopy is a special form of X-ray that produces real-time video images, as opposed to pictures on film, making it possible to see internal organs and joints in motion. The esophagram, or barium swallow, is a fluoroscopic exam of the function and appearance of the esophagus. The patient is instructed to drink a contrast material of barium sulfate compound that enables the radiologist to assess the swallowing process in real time. The radiologist is able to detect narrowing or irritation of the esophagus, blockages, hiatal hernia, or abnormally enlarged veins that may cause bleeding in the esophagus, ulcers, polyps, or tumor.

CPT Code
74220

Indications
Painful or difficult swallowing, blood-stained vomit, abdominal pain, weight loss.

Contraindications
Pregnancy, known or suspected esophageal perforation.

How Does Your Patient Prepare?
There is no preparation required for the exam.

What Happens During the Test?
The technologist will obtain a medical history. The patient will be given a cup of barium to drink while the radiologist watches and evaluates the swallowing process using fluoroscopy. As the barium coats the lining of the esophagus, images are taken to track the pathway to the stomach. The patient may be placed in various positions during the exam. The procedure takes approximately 10 minutes.

After the Exam
The patient will be instructed to drink sufficient fluids to eliminate the barium. Following the procedure, the patient may resume normal activities.

The Results
A radiologist will analyze the images and send a signed report to the referring physician within one business day.

(Information adapted from Web MD and Dr. Paul Keller)

This information is intended for use as merely a guideline for referring physicians and their staff members only. It contains information pertaining to the most commonly ordered exams and indications. However, Shawnee Mission Medical Center Radiology does not recommend any particular examination. Individual radiologist preference or patient circumstances may dictate ordering alternative studies. Although contrast codes are not needed to place an order, the following contrast codes may be used in placing orders:
CT Contrast Q9967, MRI contrast A9577 and A9579.