



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Barium Enema

Let's start with the colon itself. The colon—or "large bowel"—is the last part of your digestive tract. It stores solid food wastes until they are eliminated by bowel movements.

Sometimes the colon develops problems, such as inflammation, tumors, and other abnormalities. Often these problems are identified by using X-rays. But ordinary X-rays don't show much detail within the colon. To become visible, the colon must be filled with a barium sulfate solution—a mineral that shows up on X-ray films and reveals the structure of the colon. The barium sulfate solution is inserted into the colon by an enema. That's why this technique is called a barium enema.

Here's what to expect during a barium enema. The examination will be conducted by a specially trained technologist and by a radiologist—a doctor who's an expert in using X-rays. It often produces mild discomfort—as if your bowels were full—but generally has no lasting aftereffects. However, if you tend to be constipated, you should take a mild laxative in the evening after your examination.

After the examination, the X-rays must be developed and interpreted by the radiologist. The radiologist's report is then sent to your doctor, who should contact you about the results within 7 to 14 days after the examination.

Since it is best to avoid radiation during pregnancy, a barium enema should not be performed on a pregnant woman except in special situations. So if you are pregnant, or think you might be, make sure that you tell your health care professional. You can schedule your X-ray examination during your menstrual period, when there is little chance of pregnancy.

Before the examination, carefully follow the instructions you've been given about the appointment and preparations for the examination. It is important that your colon be well cleaned out before the examination. That way, any abnormality that might be present can be clearly seen on the X-ray films. If you are a diabetic or have severe diarrhea or severe bleeding you may be given special instructions by your health care professional. The standard instructions include being restricted to clear fluids for 24 hours before the the test and taking special tablets and liquid, and using rectal suppositories



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then

click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button

- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

© 1998, The Permanente Medical Group, Inc.

REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION