

# Gastric emptying scan

## Patient information factsheet

### What is a nuclear medicine scan?

- A nuclear medicine scan is a very common medical procedure.
- It uses small amounts of radioactive materials to show a specific organ.
- This helps your Doctor diagnose (find the problem) and, in some cases, treat some diseases.
- The scan uses a gamma camera to look for signs of disease.
- It shows the Doctor how well your organs are working. Other types of scans show what your organs look like.

### What is a gastric emptying scan?

- A gastric emptying scan uses radioactive isotopes (variants of a chemical element) to check how quickly food leaves the stomach.
- The energy emitted by the radioactive source is detected by a gamma camera, which creates a computerised image.
- Gastric emptying scans are often used to diagnose gastroparesis, a condition in which the stomach's muscles don't work properly. This delays food from being sent to the small intestine.
- For more information about this condition, please see <https://www.healthline.com/health/gastroparesis>
- Your doctor may order the scans if you frequently vomit, feel bloated after eating, or complain of abdominal pain. Other common symptoms of gastroparesis include:
  - weight loss
  - changes in blood sugar levels
  - serious dehydration
  - esophagitis (inflammation of the oesophagus)
  - malnutrition from not absorbing nutrients.

- Many of these symptoms can interfere with your quality of life.
- A gastric emptying scan can help your doctor diagnose gastroparesis or other disorders causing these symptoms.

## Do I have to do anything to prepare for this procedure?

- **PLEASE CALL US IF YOU HAVE DIETARY REQUIREMENTS OR YOU VOMIT WHEN EATING.**
- You need to fast from midnight (NO FOOD OR DRINK).
- Please **STOP** the following drugs **2** days before your scan: **Metoclopramide, Domperidone, Tegaserod, and Erythromycin.** Please contact us if you have any questions about taking your tablets.
- **FOR DIABETIC PATIENTS:**
  - **Please come 30 minutes earlier than your appointment time.**
  - Please bring your glucose monitor and short acting insulin with you.
  - You will have no food for most of the morning other than the mashed potato meal that we will prepare for you as part of this test.
  - Please adjust your insulin intake as necessary: the scan requires your sugar levels to be within a certain range, otherwise we may not be able to do it.

## What happens on the day of the scan?

### On arrival

- **A mashed potato meal** which contains a small amount of a radioactive tracer will be prepared for you.
- You will be asked to finish eating this meal within ten minutes.
- The scan of your abdomen will start as soon as you finish the meal.
- You will be scanned for about one hour, while lying down flat on our scanning bed.

## 2 hours after the meal

- Extra images of your abdomen will be taken for about 10 minutes.
- You will not be able to eat in between both scans.
- The images will then be reviewed and further delayed imaging, up to four hours after the meal, may be required.

## Is it dangerous?

- The scans are safe and painless.
- Because a small amount of radioactive tracer is used, there is only a very small risk of radiation exposure.
- If you have any worries or questions about the scan, please talk to your Doctor or contact the Nuclear Medicine department.

## Are there any precautions?

- Please tell the Nuclear Medicine Technologist or Radiographer if you might be pregnant or are breastfeeding before you come to your appointment.
- **You might need to stop breastfeeding for a short time after your scan.**
- Please tell us if you feel anxious in small spaces (claustrophobia), or cannot lie down flat.

## What happens after the scan?

- Drink lots of water.
- The radioactive tracer leaves your body through your pee (urine). Drinking lots of water will help get rid of it faster.
- **Do not have any blood or urine tests for 24 hours after your scan because the radioactive tracer may still be in your body.**

## How do I get my result?

- A Radiologist reviews (looks at) the scan and sends the report to the Specialist Doctor who asked for it. They will then contact you directly.
- This can take about 2 to 3 weeks.

## Is there anything else I should know?

- You will need to lie down flat and stay still during the scan. Moving can make the pictures unclear.
- **Please do not bring anyone with you who is pregnant or under 18 years old.** This is because there are radioactive materials in the department.
- **We do not allow anyone under 18** to interpret for patients.
- If you need an interpreter, please tell the Nuclear Medicine department, and they will arrange one for you.

## Contact our service

Email: [whh-tr.nuclearmedwhitthealth@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.nuclearmedwhitthealth@nhs.net)

Monday to Thursday, 9 am to 5 pm: 020 7288 5517.

Friday: Please call our mobile on 07747 037 143.

## Contact our Trust

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on **020 7288 5551** or [whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.PALS@nhs.net).

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet, please email [whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.patient-information@nhs.net). We will try our best to meet your needs.

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## Document information

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