Pediatric Videofluoroscopic Swallow Study (VFSS)

Frequently asked Questions

What is a swallow study (VFSS)?

A special test using x-ray to test your child’s swallow function. The test shows how liquid and food moves over the tongue, through the pharynx and into the esophagus. A speech pathologist is a person who does this test.

This test helps us:

- Learn about the reasons for the swallowing challenge.
- Learn about ways to assist your child with swallowing in a safe way.

Pictures taken during the test are saved in your child’s medical electronic record, and may be looked at any time by your child’s team.

Who takes part in the swallow study?

A speech pathologist does the test in a radiology room. A radiologist operates the camera, and helps make medical diagnoses and identify structural problems with swallowing. We want you to be there during the test to help keep your child calm and cooperative. Anyone who is pregnant cannot be in the room during the x-ray part of the study. If you are pregnant, please bring a person who your child is comfortable with, to help during the x-ray.

What happens during a swallow study?

The test may be done with your child lying on the x-ray table or sitting in a tumble form inserted into a high chair. A standard chair or the child’s wheelchair is used for older children.

What should I bring to the test?

- Foods and liquids your child can swallow without problems.
- Foods and liquids your child has problems swallowing.
- Bottle and/or cup your child uses at home.
- Your child’s favorite toys.

What does a speech pathologist do, during the study?

- Mixes the food and liquid you brought from home with barium sulfate that allows the food and liquid to be seen on the x-ray video.
- Works with you to give your child foods and liquids you brought from home.
- Decides the order and amount of foods and liquids to give. Depending on how your child is doing, may change the thickness or thinness of the foods and liquids.
- May change your child’s position.
• May change your child’s feeding technique.
• After the test is done, will look at the video of the test with you and talk with you about results and recommendations.

**How long does the test take?**

You are scheduled for a 1 hour appointment. The first ½ hour is for getting information from you, setting up the room, mixing the foods you brought with barium and positioning your child for the test.

Once the actual test starts, it should only a few minutes. The amount of time depends on your child’s

• Age
• Interest and cooperation.
• How many foods and liquids are being tested
• How many types of thicknesses and thinness of foods and liquids are being tested
• How many feeding techniques are being tested

**How much radiation exposure is there during a swallow study?**

It is a small amount like other x-rays of the neck. The risk is low compared to the risks of aspiration. If you have concerns or questions, please feel free to talk to the radiologist during the test.

**Does the barium taste bad?** Infants and children under 18 months typically accept the taste of the barium. Older children may not like the taste or texture of the barium. The barium is mixed into the foods and liquids you brought from home and can help your child with the taste of the barium. We also have flavored kool-aide powder to add to the liquids as needed.

**Does the barium have any side effects?**

Not usually. If your child is also having an upper GI which includes drinking more barium, your child may have some whiteness in the stool or mild constipation after the test. To help the barium pass through your child’s digestive system, give more liquids or fruit after the test.

**Will my child have pain during the swallow study?**

There are no actions performed during the test that cause pain. Some children are afraid of the unknown. Others are afraid of being in an exam room or hospital where they may have had other procedures that were not positive.

We want you and your child to be as comfortable as possible during the test. Before the test date, the speech pathologist will talk with you about what happens during the test. Your child may be part of this conversation if you would like. Some parents have short talks with their children at home to get ready for the test.

**Where do families go for the swallow study procedure through UW Health?**

There are two locations that our outpatient pediatric swallow studies are done. The scheduler, who makes your appointment, will tell you the location of your child’s swallow study.
1. **American Family Children’s Hospital (AFCH)** - (1675 Highland Avenue, Madison, WI 53792)
   Please check in on the **first floor** in the Radiology Pavilion, near the Guest Depot. The examining SLP will meet you in the waiting area.

2. **Digestive Health Center (DHC)** – (750 University Row, Madison, WI 53705)
   Please check in on the **3rd floor**, in the Radiology area.

**NOTE:** If you have any questions or if you need to cancel or reschedule your appointment, please contact the UW Outpatient Pediatric Rehab clinic ASAP, at (608) 263-8412.