



**University  
Hospitals Sussex**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Your videofluoroscopy swallowing study (VFSS)

Speech and Language Therapy

Patient information

## What is this information about?

This information is about videofluoroscopy swallowing study (VFSS).

### It explains:

- what a videofluoroscopy swallowing study (VFSS) is
- why you may need a VFSS
- what a VFSS can tell us about how you swallow
- some other tests that we may use to find out about how you swallow
- the risks and possible side effects of having a VFSS
- how you should prepare for your VFSS
- what happens during your VFSS
- who to contact if you need further information or support.

## Why have I been given this information?

You have been given this information because you need to have a videofluoroscopy swallowing study (VFSS). This is because you are finding it difficult to swallow. The VFSS helps us to find out what your swallowing difficulty is and its cause. It can help us to see if there are ways to make your swallow safer and easier.

You may already have seen a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) who checked your swallow. Sometimes the results of this first check are not clear. A VFSS will help us to understand your swallowing difficulty more clearly.

### Reading this information and following the advice in it will:

- help you to know what to expect from your VFSS and to prepare for it
- help to make sure that we get the best possible images from your VFSS.

## What is a VFSS?

A VFSS uses X-rays to show moving images of how your swallowing works. The X-ray images are recorded in video format.

We record images of your head and neck as you swallow food and drink. This allows us to see how your food and drink move from your lips through your mouth and into your food-pipe (oesophagus).

## What can you see using a VFSS?

**We use VFSS to see:**

- if your food or drink is going down the wrong way (into your 'windpipe' or 'airway'). This can happen:
  - without you realising it
  - even if you cough to try to clear food or drink from your windpipe.
- if some food or drink consistencies (such as thicker, thinner, or more lumpy or smooth) are easier for you to swallow than others.
- if your swallowing can be improved or made safer by changing the position of your head or body or by trying other things
- the amount of food or drink (or both) that you can safely swallow with each mouthful over a mealtime.

## Are there any other ways in which you may check my swallow?

Some people may be able to have a Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES). This involves placing a small camera at the end of a tube through the nose and throat. It allows Speech and Language therapists or Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialists to see your swallowing.

The Principal Speech and Language Therapist will be involved in deciding if FEES is right for you.

## What should I do to prepare for my appointment?

- Arrange to have a family member or carer to come to the appointment with you if you would like to. They will have to stand behind a glass screen while you have your VFSS. If they usually help you to eat and will be doing so during your VFSS they will need to wear a lead apron which we will provide.
- Continue to eat and drink as your Speech and Language therapist has advised. If you have a feeding tube, continue to have your feeds as usual.
- Continue to take your usual medicines.
- If you cannot attend your appointment do contact the Speech and Language Therapy Department at the hospital your appointment is booked with. Please do this as soon as possible.

## What should I do on the day of my appointment?

- Tell us about any allergies that you have.
- You can wear your own clothes while you have your VFSS unless we ask you to change.
- Remove any metal items (such as earrings or other jewellery or zips) from around your head and neck. These show up on the X-ray. They can make it difficult for the Speech and Language Therapist and Radiologist to see your swallow clearly.
- Bring any special adapted cups or cutlery that you usually use with you. This is so we can see you eat and drink in the way that you usually do.
- Bring any special food or drinks with you if you would like or need to. For example, this might be foods for special dietary needs. We provide a range of food and drinks for you to have during your VFSS.
- If you wear dentures, please bring them with you.

## What happens on the day of my VFSS appointment?

- You will have your appointment as an outpatient in a hospital clinic unless you are already staying in hospital as an inpatient.
- You may have to wait in the clinic for a time before you have your VFSS.
- The VFSS is likely to take around 30 to 45 minutes.
- The Clinic is led by an SLT. They will look at what is shown on the X-ray and check your swallow.
  - A Radiographer (specialist in doing X-rays) will be there to use and control the X-ray machine.
  - There may be students in the VFSS clinic watching the X-ray and learning from the Radiographer or SLT. If you would prefer for there not to be a student present during your VFSS, please let us know.
- You will be seated in a chair or wheelchair during your VFSS. We will adjust your position as needed so that we can get clear images.
- You are unlikely to feel any pain or discomfort.

## When do I get the results of my VFSS?

We may tell you some information about your results on the day.

After you have had your VFSS the SLT leading the clinic will look at the X-ray images and write a report. The report contains results and advice for you on what may happen next. It is approved by our Consultant Radiologist (specialist in X-rays).

### **A copy of the report is sent to:**

- you by post or email.
- your SLT
- your consultant or GP (or both).

If there is anything in the report which is not clear or you have any questions about it, please ask your SLT to explain.

## Are there any risks or side effects from having a VFSS?

- **X-ray radiation.** Any check that uses X-rays carries a small risk from the radiation you receive. The radiation dose for VFSS is small. The radiographer makes sure that the dose of radiation that you get is as small as possible so that your health is not put at risk.
- **Side effects from 'contrast.'** We mix the food and drink that you have during your VFSS with 'contrast.' This is something that makes the food or drink show up clearly on the X-ray so we can see clearly how you are swallowing it. The contrast may be either gastromiro (which dissolves in water) or barium.

Most people do not get side effects from gastromiro or barium. Some people may get constipation (hard, dry poos that make it difficult or painful for you to have a poo). Barium may turn your poo (faeces, stools) white. The barium is likely to take around 24 to 48 hours (1 to 2 days) to go through your digestive system.

Eating foods which are high in fibre can help to clear the barium from your body more quickly. Only do this if your Speech and Language therapist has advised you that it is ok to do so.

- **Food or drink used in the VFSS going down the wrong way** (into your windpipe). Some food or drink may go down the wrong way. Very rarely this might be a large amount. If this makes you unwell, we will get you medical help.

Before you have your VFSS we will ask you if you understand what it involves and agree (consent) to have it. **Do** ask before you give your consent if you have any questions. You can withdraw your consent at any time if you do not want to have the VFSS or would like us to stop while we are doing it.

## What happens if my VFSS shows that it is not safe for me to eat or drink?

For most people, the VFSS helps us to find:

- the safest way for them to swallow
- the kinds of food and drink that they can manage best.

For some people, the VFSS may show that it is unsafe for them to swallow. If your VFSS shows that your swallow is unsafe we will:

- fully explain this to you
- give you recommendations and advice.

The report of your VFSS that we will send to you will suggest what you can do and what help we can give you to make swallowing easier for you.

**This may include:**

- giving you information about ways to make it less likely that your food or drink (or both) will go down the wrong way. For example, this could be holding your head or body in a different position when you eat or drink.
- avoiding some textures of foods
- preparing your food or drinks in a different way
- asking your GP or consultant to refer you or send you for further investigations.

## What happens to the X-ray from my VFSS?

The images will be held in the hospital as part of your patient record. This is done in accordance with Department of Health guidelines.

We would like to use your images to help train other professionals, including doctors. This will be done confidentially. Your name will not be mentioned. If you would prefer us not to use your VFSS images in this way, please tell us know when you attend your appointment.

# Who can I contact for further information or support?

After reading this information, please make note of any questions you would like to ask when you attend clinic.

If you have any further questions or are unsure about anything you have read, contact the appropriate Speech and Language Therapy department on:

## Worthing Hospital

**01903 205111 Ext. 85582**

## St. Richard's Hospital, Chichester

**01243 788122 Ext. 35204 or 35205**

## Princess Royal Hospital, Haywards Heath

**01444 441881 Ext. 68057**

## Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton

**01273 696955 Ext. 64891, 64931 or 64213.**

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Ref. number: 2728  
Publication date: 05/2026  
Review date: 05/2029

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