



DOWN SYNDROME PROGRAM
www.massgeneral.org/downsyndrome

Video Swallow Study: What to Expect

In this handout, you will learn what to expect for the video swallow study and how to prepare.

WHAT IS A VIDEO SWALLOW STUDY?

A **video swallow study (VSS)** is an imaging test that helps doctors learn more about the following:

- How your son/daughter swallows food or liquid
- The strength of your son/daughter's swallowing muscles
- If there is a risk of **aspiration** (certain foods or liquids going into the airway)

HOW DOES THE VSS WORK?

For the VSS, your son/daughter will swallow small amounts of a contrast liquid called **barium**. Barium can be swallowed from a bottle (for babies) or a cup (for children and teens).

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FOR THE VSS?

- **The VSS takes about 45 minutes to 1 hour.** Please arrive 15 minutes early. You can stay with your son/daughter for the VSS.
- **Your son/daughter will sit in an infant seat or chair for the VSS,** depending on his/her age.
- **The VSS is done by a radiologic technologist** (a person who does imaging tests) **and a speech pathologist** (a person who helps people with speech and swallowing concerns).
- **Barium has a chalky, bitter taste.** You can mix barium with small amounts of your son/daughter's favorite foods or liquids.
- **There are no side effects to barium.** You might see a white color in your son/daughter's stool after the VSS.

WHERE DO I CHECK IN FOR THE VSS?

Check in for the VSS at Pediatric Radiology on the Boston campus on Ellison 2. Below are directions on how to get to Pediatric Radiology:

1. Enter the main entrance of Massachusetts General Hospital.
2. Walk straight past the Information Desk. Coffee Central is straight ahead.
3. Just before Coffee Central, turn left toward the Ellison/Blake elevators.
4. Take the Ellison elevators to the 2nd floor.
5. Follow the signs for Pediatric Radiology.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR THE VSS?

- **Do not feed or offer drinks to your son/daughter 2-3 hours before the scheduled exam time.** Children tend to take part in the exam more if they are hungry.
- **Bring your son/daughter's favorite bottle, sippy cup or cup with a straw.** You can bring more than one if your son/daughter typically drinks from more than one cup.
- **Bring important reports** from your son/daughter's therapists or doctors that describe feeding or swallowing concerns.
- **If your son/daughter eats solid food,** bring his/her favorite chewable foods and purees to mix with the barium.
- **If he/she has trouble swallowing a certain food or liquid,** bring that food or liquid as well.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE VSS?

The **speech-language pathologist** will go over the video recording of the VSS and next steps before you leave. If the speech-language pathologist finds a swallowing disorder he/she might recommend follow-up care with a specialist (doctor who cares for specific medical concerns).