

Barrett's oesophagus surveillance

Endoscopy Department Patient information

You have been given this information leaflet as you have Barrett's oesophagus, a condition that means there are changes in the cells lining your oesophagus (food pipe). People with Barrett's oesophagus have a slightly higher chance of developing oesophageal cancer and as we know earlier detection improves outcomes, your medical team will ask you to have a test every three years so they can look for any further changes in your oesophagus. For more information visit www.heartburncanceruk.org.

What is a capsule sponge test?

A capsule sponge test is one way to check on the health of your oesophagus and involves swallowing a capsule the size of a vitamin pill (see information below). This test can help to identify those patients who may need an endoscopy, a further test which involves placing a long thin tube with a small camera, called an endoscope, into the throat. Many people who have this sponge capsule test will not need an endoscopy.

It is entirely your decision whether to have a sponge capsule test. If you do not want to take up this test you will be added to the endoscopy waiting list, as it is important to check for changes to your oesophagus. If your doctor thinks you are at high risk, you may require further investigations.

What are the possible benefits?

By having this test, we hope to diagnose any abnormalities in your oesophagus easily and to start any necessary treatment as soon as possible. If it is found you do have any changes, also called dysplasia, we will be able to offer treatment, if needed, at an earlier stage.

Please note, it is not possible, or often necessary, to offer an endoscopy to everyone with Barrett's oesophagus, and currently endoscopy services may also have longer waiting times.

What is involved?

A 30-minute appointment will be arranged for you by the capsule sponge team. The test takes about ten minutes, and you will receive the results within a few weeks. On the day of the test, you will be told how you will get the results.

The test will take sample cells and occasionally, as with many other tests, may need to be repeated.

Please do not eat or drink for four hours before the test.

If this may cause you problems, please speak to your doctor (**please continue to take any daily medication with a small amount of water**).

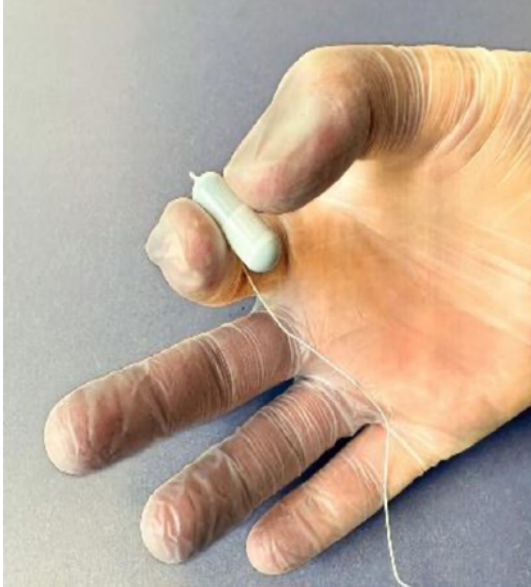
If your test result suggests you need further investigation, this will be arranged for you.

What will happen at your appointment?

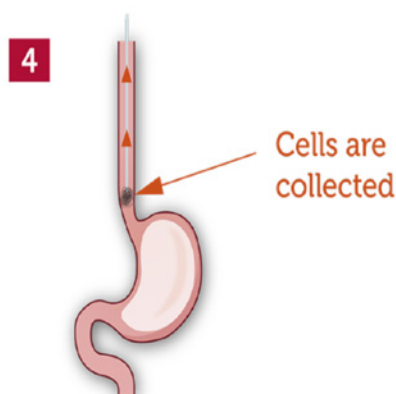
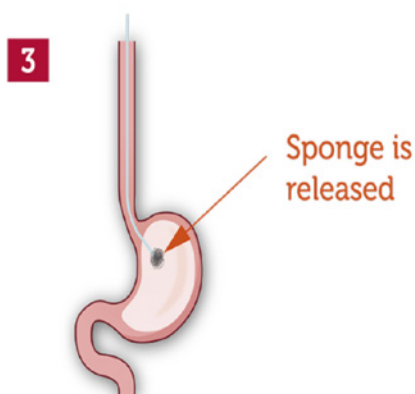
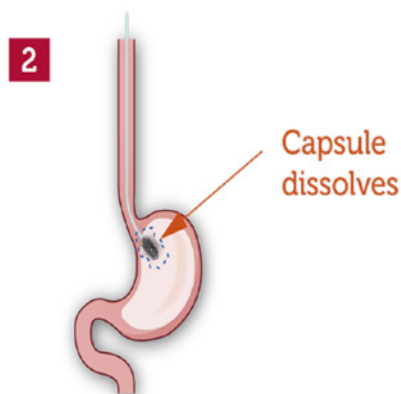
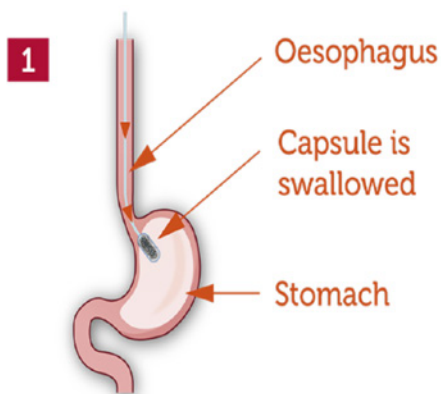
When you attend your appointment, a nurse will go through the test with you and answer any questions you may have. The nurse will then ask you to sign a consent form agreeing to the test.

We may also ask whether you would be happy to be observed during the procedure.

You will be given warm water to drink and asked to swallow the capsule which contains a small sponge.



The pictures show the capsule, which is similar in size to a vitamin pill and contains a small sponge inside a vegan shell attached to a piece of strong, thin thread. The nurse uses an applicator to place it on the back of the tongue to make it easier to swallow.



The capsule is left in your stomach for up to seven minutes until it dissolves, releasing the sponge.

The nurse will remove the sponge by pulling gently on the thread. As it is pulled out, the sponge collects a sample of the cells lining your food pipe (oesophagus).

At the appointment we may also ask you to fill in a questionnaire about your general health, lifestyle, and heartburn/acid reflux symptoms. You can complete this while you are waiting for the pill to dissolve.

We may ask for your consent to contact you later about taking part in an optional interview or a focus group a week or so after your test to talk about your experience with us. If you agree to take part in an interview, focus group, or observation, your direct quotes may be included in reports or publications. This will be done anonymously, so you cannot be identified. Don't worry, your treatment will not be affected if you do not want to take part.

Image courtesy of Heartburn UK

Laboratory testing

The sample that you provide will be looked at in a laboratory. It will also be tested by clinical or research teams to look for any sign of inflammation or cancerous changes.

The results of the test will be sent to your healthcare professionals who will share the results with you in about 4 weeks following your procedure and any necessary treatment will be discussed with you.

Are there possible side-effects or disadvantages of taking part?

- Over 15,000 people have had the test with no serious side-effects reported.
- Swallowing the capsule is not painful and most people have no problem doing so.
- Some people may experience a mild sore throat for 24 hours and in some people, this may last for a few days. Paracetamol and throat lozenges will usually help.
- After the test, you can carry on with your day as normal.
- There is a very small risk (less than 1 in 2,000) of the sponge becoming detached from the thread, or the nurse being unable to remove it. If this happens, you will be asked to attend your local hospital for an endoscopy as soon as possible where the sponge will be easily removed, and you would be discharged once you have recovered from the procedure.
- There is a very small risk that you may have some bleeding. If this happens, you will be assessed by the doctor and clinical nurse. This is unlikely to need any intervention but if required, an endoscopy at the local hospital could be performed to find and stop the bleeding. This has never been needed in 10+ years of tests.
- If you are referred for an endoscopy, this will follow standard NHS referral procedures.

To read this leaflet in a different language,
please visit our website: www.uhd.nhs.uk/visit/patient-information-leaflets
and use the language and accessibility function available along the top of the site.

To ask for this leaflet in larger print, please contact the patient experience team on **0300 019 8499**
or email uhd.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

The Royal Bournemouth Hospital, Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW
Poole Hospital, Longfleet Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 2JB

Author: **Luke Hasluck** Date: **May 2026** Version: **Two** Review date: **May 2029** Ref: **137/23**

w: www.uhd.nhs.uk  @UHDTrust  @uhd_nhs

Some of our hospital services are moving.
Visit www.uhd.nhs.uk/future to find out more.