

Video Swallow Study

What is a Video Swallow Study?

A Video Swallow Study (VSS) exam uses fluoroscopy (like an X-ray movie) and a contrast agent to see how your child swallows while eating and drinking. A speech therapist and our Radiology team work closely together to look at how your child swallows. At Texas Children's Hospital, we use state-of-the-art equipment that is specially designed for imaging pediatric patients safely using the lowest amount of radiation exposure necessary for the exam.

Why is this exam performed?

A VSS allows the Radiologist and Speech Pathologist to gather detailed information about your child's ability to eat and drink safely. Common indications for VSS include:

- Coughing with feeds
- Choking with feeds
- Aspiration
- Not tolerating feeds
- Frequent pneumonias
- Cleft palate
- Vocal cord paralysis

What to expect

Since your child will be awake for the exam, one parent or guardian (or two adults if the child has a disability) may be with the child in the exam room. It may be helpful to make arrangements for other siblings. For safety reasons, you will be asked to step out of the exam room if there is a chance you could be pregnant.

Preparing your child is key to the success of this study. To help prepare your child, our Child Life Specialists will help ease your child's fear and anxiety. Please let a staff member know if you are interested in a Child Life consultation at no additional cost.

Your child and the accompanying adult(s) will be taken to the procedure room by a technologist and be asked to change into a gown. The child will need to remove underwear and socks as well. The room has an x-ray machine, a long table, and a television monitor. If you have any questions, the Radiologist or X-ray Technologist will answer them before the test begins.

It would be helpful if you bring a food your child prefers or has trouble swallowing (e.g., goldfish, crackers, yogurt melts, and chicken nuggets). Also, if your child drinks from a specific bottle or sippy cup, please bring it with you. The Speech Therapist does provide applesauce, chips, and cookies. If your child has any special dietary needs or restrictions, please let us know when scheduling.

For this 30-60 minute exam:

- Your child will need a chest X-ray if one has not been obtained in the last 7 days. The technologist will take the chest radiograph either lying on the table or standing up (depending on age).
- Patient positioning (depends on patient age):
 - Newborn to 6 months old- laying on a wedge sponge
 - More than 6 months old (with good head control) - seated in a special chair between the X-ray camera and table

- Your child will need to eat barium coated food and drink a liquid contrast called barium from a cup/straw, bottle, syringe or sippy cup while taking pictures with the camera. This can be flavored with chocolate, strawberry, fruit punch or grape (dependent on location). While drinking and eating, the Radiologist/Radiology Physician Extender will move the X-ray camera and ask your child to swallow multiple times. The camera will not touch your child.
- The Speech Therapist might ask your child to try different liquid consistencies to help find the safest and best way for your child to eat.
- You will be provided discharge instructions at the conclusion of your appointment.

After the procedure

Your child may resume his or her normal diet/prescribed by your physician after the exam. We ask you to increase your child's fluid intake to prevent constipation. Your child's stool will be light or grey color. This is normal and is related to the ingested barium.

Receiving your VSS results

Call your doctor for a follow up appointment as instructed. You can also call the doctor who ordered the study for the results 24 to 48 hours after the test. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call Radiology Nursing at 832-826-5371.

If you would like a CD of your child's study, please call the film library at 832-822-1202. The Radiologist's report will also be included on the CD.