

# Understanding POEM

## Per oral endoscopic myotomy

### Diet plan for your POEM scheduled for:

**One week before:** eat your usual diet, or as recommended by your specialist

**2 days before:** have a liquid diet only: clear soup, jelly, ice cream, Ensure/Fortisip/Complan  
Drink one litre of Coca Cola

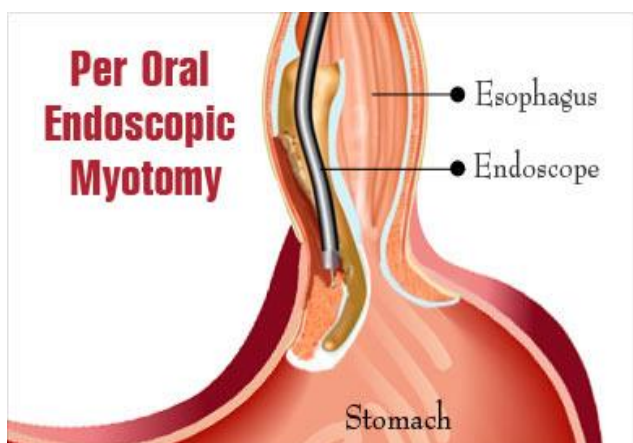
**1 day before:** liquids only  
1 litre of Coca Cola

**Day of the procedure:** drink water only until \_\_\_\_\_am

**Other advice:**

### What is a POEM procedure?

A POEM procedure involves forming a tunnel in the wall of your oesophagus and/or stomach that allows cutting the outside muscle layer without causing a leak of gut contents. It can be used in the treatment of achalasia, oesophageal spasm disorders, diverticula of the oesophagus, or spasm of the pylorus valve of the stomach. Your doctor will have explained the exact reason for the POEM procedure to you, and any available alternatives.



### What preparation is required?

As POEM can only be performed when the oesophagus is clear of food, it is important to follow the dietary advice exactly. For most people this will involve having only liquids to eat in the 2 days before the operation, although this period may be longer for some people. Liquid foods include clear soups, jellies, icecream and smooth yoghurts, or supplements such as Ensure or Fortisip. In addition, to dissolve any solid food from earlier that might be sitting in the oesophagus, we ask that you drink about 2 litres of Coca Cola (standard or Diet) across those 2 days as well.

Because a general anaesthetic is required for the POEM, you cannot take any food on the day of the procedure, or water within 2 hours before the procedure time.

### Possible medication adjustments

Most medications including those for blood pressure should be taken early on the morning of the POEM with a sip of water. If you are on aspirin you should let us know and you will be told whether or not you should stop it. If you take blood thinners such as warfarin, dabigatran or clopidogrel let us know so we can plan to stop these safely. If you have diabetes let us know so we can adjust your medication and/or alter your diet plan.

### You will be contacted for a pre-assessment

A nurse will contact you approximately a week before the procedure. Be prepared for this phone call with a list of medications you take and any questions you want to ask.

Because the procedure involves a general anaesthetic, you will also usually need an anaesthetic pre-assessment either with a nurse or

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doctor. Sometimes this will be a phone appointment but other times you will need to be seen in person.

### **What happens during the procedure?**

For most people having a POEM, in order to check the oesophagus is clear of food before starting, we will spray your throat with local anaesthetic and quickly look in the oesophagus with a gastroscop and suck out any excess liquid. Then the anaesthetist will insert intravenous catheters into your arm, give you oxygen by mask, and put you off to sleep.

Once you are asleep the POEM will be performed. It involves cutting a small entry into the wall of the oesophagus, then creating a tunnel through the middle layer of the wall. After the tunnel has been formed, the outer muscle layer is cut. The tunnel entry is then closed by small metal clips.

You will then be woken up and moved to the recovery area.

### **What happens after the procedure?**

Usually after a POEM you will stay in hospital for one night for observation to make sure there are no problems. You will not be able to eat or drink until the next morning. Fluids and antibiotics will be given to you through the intravenous catheter, as well as any pain relief you might require. If you are well in the morning then you will be allowed to drink, and then consume liquid foods such as jelly and soup. Usually you can go home around lunchtime. You will need someone to drive you home because of the general anaesthetic.

The most common problem patients notice after a POEM is pain in the central or lower chest which can be accompanied by a fever. This is due to cutting the oesophagus tissues during the POEM or gas from the gastroscop going into the tissues outside of the oesophagus. This is usually managed easily with painkillers, and gets better over the hours. Sometimes the painkillers can

cause nausea (feeling sick). Some fluid can develop on the outside of the lungs which might cause the feeling of more difficult breathing. This goes away over a few days.

### **What can go wrong?**

POEM is a surgical procedure so the risks are greater than for gastroscopy or colonoscopy. Even so, serious problems are very infrequent. The main risk of POEM is of a leak of oesophagus contents into the surrounding tissues. This might be because of the clips closing the tunnel falling off, or from the tunnel roof being damaged during the POEM. If this occurs then there will be signs of infection such as a fever, and increased pain. Treatment may require putting drainage tubes into the chest at a further surgery, and a period of time in hospital. Bleeding in the tunnel is rare, and can cause pain. Other rare problems include a collapsed lung and heart rhythm changes.

### **What happens afterwards?**

Because there is swelling in the oesophagus for several days after the POEM, you should have a liquid/puree consistency diet for one week to prevent food getting stuck. You can take your usual medications. After a week you can resume a normal diet. Generally you will come back to clinic for review in about three months. Because cutting the muscle valve in the oesophagus to relieve the swallowing problems can increase increased acid reflux, if this becomes a problem for you we recommend you use omeprazole once or twice a day to treat your symptoms.

#### **Contact us**

**Gastroenterology Department  
Level 6, Clinical Support Block,  
Wellington Regional Hospital**

**Phone:** (04)385 5999 Extension 6223

**Appointment enquiries:** (04) 385 5999  
Extension 5169

**Hours:** 8am-4.30pm, Monday to Friday  
(excluding public holidays)