

DEXA SCAN

What is a DEXA Scan?

Bone densitometry scanning, also called dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA or DEXA) or simply a "bone density scan," is an enhanced form of X-ray technology that is used to measure bone loss. DEXA is today's established standard for measuring bone mineral densitometry.

An X-ray (radiograph) is a painless medical test that helps physicians diagnose and treat medical conditions. Radiography involves exposing a part of the body to a small dose of ionizing radiation to produce pictures of the inside of the body. X-rays are the oldest and most frequently used form of medical imaging.

DEXA is most often performed on the lower spine and hips. Portable DEXA devices, including some that use ultrasound waves rather than x-rays, measure the wrist, fingers or heel and are sometimes used for screening purposes.

Common uses

DEXA bone densitometry is most often used to diagnose osteoporosis, a condition that often affects women after menopause but may also be found in men. Osteoporosis involves a gradual loss of calcium, causing the bones to become thinner, more fragile, and more likely to break.

DEXA is also effective in tracking the effects of treatment for osteoporosis and other conditions that cause bone loss. The DEXA test can also assess an individual's risk for developing fractures.

Safety

Special care is taken during X-ray examinations to use the lowest radiation dose possible while producing the best images for evaluation. National and international radiology protection councils continually review and update the technique standards used by radiology professionals.

State-of-the-art X-ray systems have tightly controlled X-ray beams with significant filtration and dose control methods to minimize stray or scatter radiation. This ensures those parts of a patient's body not being imaged receive minimal radiation exposure.

Preparing for your DEXA Scan

What should I expect BEFORE my bone densitometry exam?

Food and drink

On the day of your Bone Densitometry Scan you may eat normally. You should not take calcium supplements for at least 24 hours before your exam.

When to arrive

Please arrive 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment time to.

What to wear

Wear comfortable clothing, preferably clothes with no zipper or buttons, such as sweats. You may also be asked to remove jewelry, eyeglasses and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the images.

Other information

Inform your physician if you recently had a barium examination or have been injected with a contrast material for a computed tomography (CT) scan or radioisotope scan. You may have to wait 10 to 14 days before undergoing a DEXA test.

Women should always inform their physician or technologist if there is any possibility that they are pregnant. Many imaging tests are not performed during pregnancy because radiation can be harmful to the fetus. If an X-ray is necessary, precautions will be taken to minimize radiation exposure to the baby.

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What will I experience DURING my bone densitometry exam?

Scanning

Bone densitometry scans are a quick and painless procedure, and usually done on an outpatient basis. You will lie on a padded table. An X-ray generator is located below you and an imaging device, or detector, is positioned above.

To assess your spine, your legs will be supported on a padded box to flatten the pelvis and lower (lumbar) spine. To assess the hip, your foot will be placed in a brace that rotates the hip inward. In both cases, the detector is slowly passed over the area, generating images on a computer monitor. You must hold very still and may be asked to keep from breathing for a few seconds while the picture is taken to reduce the possibility of a blurred image. The technologist will walk behind a wall or into the next room to activate the x-ray machine.

Length of scan

The scan is usually completed within 10 to 30 minutes.

What should I expect AFTER my bone densitometry exam?

You may resume normal activity immediately after your bone densitometry scan.

DEXA Scan results

We understand that quick results are important for our patients. Exams are typically read within 24 hours and results will be sent to your physician who will go over them with you.