

Patient Information – Bone Densitometry/DXA Scan

Department of Radiology – Hertford County Hospital

What is a bone densitometry (DXA) scan?

A bone densitometry scan (Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry or DXA scan) uses X-ray equipment and a computer to measure bone density. Everyone's bones become less dense as they grow older but this natural process may be accelerated leading to osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is a thinning of the bones which makes them more likely to fracture (break). Areas most affected are the spine, hips and wrists.

In the UK, osteoporosis affects roughly 1 in 2 women and 1 in 5 men. Some contributing factors are:

- Early menopause
- Hysterectomy
- Regular use of steroids
- Thyroid problems
- Low calcium intake
- Heavy smoking
- Heavy alcohol consumption

Risks

This procedure involves the use of ionising radiation. The risks are very low and are outweighed by the benefits of having the scan, which will help your doctor decide the treatment or prevention options that are right for you.

Are there any precautions?

Please inform this department **before** your appointment date if:

- you are, or think you may be pregnant;
- you have an appointment for a Barium examination or a Nuclear Medicine scan involving an injection of a radioactive isotope. You will need to wait **three days** before you can have your scan as the barium or isotope will affect the bone density measurement;
- you have any difficulty with mobility that may prevent you getting onto the scanner table.

What's involved in having the scan?

You will be weighed and measured before the scan. Please try to wear loose clothing which does not contain a lot of metal buttons or zips, however, you may need to undress for your scan. A hospital gown and a basket for your clothes will be provided.

You will be asked to lie on the scanner table. During the scan a mechanical arm moves above the areas being examined (usually the lower back and left hip). Each scan will take about 5 – 10 minutes.

You can breathe normally but should keep as still as possible. A radiographer will remain with you throughout. The scan has no after-effects and you may find the whole procedure quite relaxing.

When will I receive my results?

The results of your scan will be sent to your referring doctor who will discuss them with you at your next appointment. Staff will not be able to give you any results immediately after the scan.

Can I bring someone with me?

A relative or a friend may accompany you to the department, but they will not be allowed into the scan room.

Feedback

When you attend your hospital appointment you should be offered the Friends and Family Test survey asking you the question, “**How likely are you to recommend our service to friends and family if they needed similar care or treatment?**”. We welcome your comments about what was good about your visit and what would have made your experience better. Your feedback is anonymous and is used to help improve the services we provide to all our patients.

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