

Bone Densitometry (DXA) Scan

Radiology Department

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 can be accelerated by certain conditions and situations leading to osteoporosis. Osteoporosis can cause bones to be more fragile and therefore more likely to fracture (break). Areas most affected are the spine, hips and wrists

In the UK it affects about 1 in 2 women and 1 in 5 men.

Factors that can increase the chance of osteoporosis include:

- Early menopause
- Having a hysterectomy
- Regular use of steroids
- Thyroid problems
- Coeliac disease
- Autoimmune conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis
- Lack of calcium
- Smoking / vaping (containing nicotine)
- High regular alcohol consumption

Are there any risks?

The scan involves the use of ionising radiation; however the risks are very low and are outweighed by the benefits of having the scan.

Why is the scan helpful?

Your DXA scan results will help your doctor decide if treatment or prevention options are needed to maintain better bone health, reducing the risk of possible fractures in the future.

Before your appointment – please call us if:

- You are pregnant
- Currently breastfeeding
- You have had a test with contrast dye (swallowed or injected) less than 10 days before your DXA appointment. This includes the following:
 - Barium swallow
 - Nuclear medicine scan
 - CT or MRI with contrast
 - An angiogram
- You have any difficulty with mobility which may prevent you getting onto the scanning table
- You cannot lie still for the scan

- You weigh 32 stone (204 kg) or more

Can I bring someone with me?

Yes. Someone can come with you, but they usually cannot go into the scan room.

On the day of your scan

- Go to the Radiology Department on the ground floor and book in at reception
- You will need to be changed into a hospital gown
- Please wear plain underwear without metal or plastic
- We will measure your height and weight

What happens during the scan?

You will lie down on the scanner table, and a small mechanical arm will move over the areas being examined. This is normally your lower back and left hip. You can breathe normally but try to keep very still. A radiographer will stay with you in the room for the scan.

How Long Does It Take?

Normally around 20 minutes in total.

Are There Any Side Effects?

No. You will feel nothing during or after the scan.

Can I Eat and Drink Normally?

Yes. You can eat and drink as usual before and after the scan.

When Will I Get My Results?

Your results will be sent to the doctor who referred you and they will talk to you about them at your next appointment.

Questions or Concerns?

Please contact the Radiology Department if you have any questions. If you cannot come to your appointment, please call 01992 823153 at least 48 hours before.

Useful contact details

Radiology Department, Hertford County Hospital:

- Telephone 01992 823153 (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk
- Telephone 01438 314333

Leaflet information

You can request this information in a different format or another language; please speak to your doctor or nurse.

Date of publication: December 2019

Version number: 10

Author: DEXA radiographer

Reference: Radiology

Review Date: June 2029

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