

Bone Density Test



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What is a Bone Density Test?

A bone mineral density test (or DXA) measures your bone density (how thick or thin your bones are). It uses a low level x-ray. This information is used to estimate the strength of your bones.

How is it done?

This test involves lying on a table for several minutes. A small x-ray detector scans your spine, one or both hips, forearm or whole body. These low level x-rays pass through your body and are recorded by a detector. It sends a picture to a computer. The computer looks at the picture and determines your bone density.

Is this test safe?

The test is safe and painless. It doesn't require any needles or any other discomfort. You receive a very small amount of radiation from a DXA test. It's about the same amount you are exposed to if you fly from Vancouver to Toronto.

What happens during the test?

When you arrive for your test you must first answer a questionnaire. It will ask about different tests you may have had and any medication you are taking.

The test is done by a technologist. The technologist will measure your height and weight before doing the scan.

You will be asked to lie on your back on a padded table. The technologist will position you so you're laying straight. You may be asked to lift your legs onto a support to straighten your back for the test.

If you need a small pillow for your head, the technologist will give you one. The detector will not touch you at any time during the scan.

Adults will have their spine and hip scanned. Children will have their spine, hip and whole body scanned. You will need to lie still for 3 – 5 minutes at a time.

The test will take about 15 minutes to complete.

How to prepare for the test:

- Do not come for the test if you are pregnant.
- Do not wear perfume.
- Wear comfortable clothes that don't have metal on them.
- Remove any body piercing before the test.
- Make sure you're able to lie flat on your back with your legs straight.

Note: The scanner doesn't like metal. If you have rods in your back and/or both hips then we can't do the scan.

What happens afterwards?

The scan is reported by a radiologist. The results will be sent to the doctor that asked for the scan. It usually takes 2 weeks for the doctor to receive the report of the scan.

If your doctor wants to retest your bones in the future, you should be retested on the same machine.