

Bone Density Scan

A bone density scan is a test that shows how strong your bones are by measuring their mineral content. A bone density scan will detect signs of osteoporosis, a condition where bones become brittle or weak.

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis occurs when the body loses bone faster than new bone can be created. It is considered a “silent disease” because you may not know you have it until you have a fracture. If untreated, this condition can make bones so weak that even a small stress like coughing can cause a bone to break. The good news is that osteoporosis is very treatable—with the proper therapies, you can slow its progression and, in some cases, offset it.

What causes osteoporosis?

Anyone—male or female—is susceptible to getting osteoporosis, although women are four times more likely to get this diagnosis. While the prevention of this condition starts early in childhood with good nutrition and exercise, there are some common risk factors to be aware of:

- Female
- Caucasian and Asian
- Advanced age
- History of bone fracture
- Family history of osteoporosis
- Alcohol and tobacco use
- Early menopause
- Low calcium diet
- Lack of exercise
- Eating disorders
- Removed ovaries
- Certain medicines (such as steroids or anticonvulsants)

Do I need a bone density scan?

It depends on your age and a few other factors. Bone strength and mass start to decrease in most women after the age of 30, but usually there’s no need for a scan until later in life.

More on back ▶



Your doctor may recommend a scan for women who are:

- 65 years or older
- Postmenopausal and with a previous bone fracture
- Considering osteoporosis therapy
- Taking prolonged hormone replacement therapy
- More than one risk

What's the scan like?

A bone density scan is easy, fast and doesn't require much preparation. It typically only takes 15 to 20 minutes.

Before your scan, your care team will confirm that you haven't had an imaging procedure in the past three days where contrast was used and that you have not taken calcium or mineral supplements within the past 24 hours. It's also helpful to wear clothes that don't have metal on them, like zippers. In the room, your trained technologist will enter your name, age, weight, gender and ethnicity into the computer to help match your results to a reference group.

During the scan, you'll lie on a large exam table and a small mechanical arm will pass over you. The bones most commonly tested are hip, spine and sometimes the forearm.

After your scan, a radiologist will read your test and report the results directly to your doctor.



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