

Bone Density Test

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A bone density test is an X-ray that can help your health care provider tell if you are at risk for osteoporosis, a disease that causes loss of bone density in both women and men.

A series of scans over a period of time can help your health care provider tell if you are losing bone mass.

Measuring your bone density is simple, safe and doesn't involve needles or getting undressed.

The test takes about 30 minutes.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes loss of bone density, or bone mass, leaving bones thin and weak. These bones may break easily. Half of all women and one-fourth of all men will have a fracture (or break) caused by osteoporosis, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation.

Bone is growing, living tissue. Old bone cells break down and new cells replace them. More bone is added than removed during childhood and teen years, making bones dense and heavy.

After age 30, bone cells break down faster than they grow. This results in a loss of bone mass. Bones can become weak and brittle. Osteoporosis has no symptoms.

Your Appointment

Hospital/Clinic: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____ a.m. / p.m.

Plan to spend _____ minutes / hours at the facility.

Phone number: _____

If you need to cancel or reschedule, call at least 24 hours before your appointment.

A woman's risk of osteoporosis increases once she reaches menopause. Women lose up to 20 percent of their bone mass during the first 5 to 7 years after menopause. The decrease in estrogen (a hormone) leads to slower bone growth. Bones absorb fewer minerals and calcium, causing them to become thinner.

Men are also at risk. By age 65, men lose bone mass at the same rate as women.

Bone Density Test

This exam has two steps.

- You will be scheduled for a bone density test. This test measures the thickness of the bones (bone density) of your lower spine, hips, forearm or all.

(over)

- Your health care provider compares your test results to the average bone density of people your age, gender and ethnic background.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that all women who have gone through menopause and who are older than age 65 have a bone density test.

Your health care provider may also determine that earlier screening is needed if you have certain risks.

Osteoporosis risks you cannot change:

- being a woman
- getting older
- having a family history of fractures
- being Caucasian or Asian.

Osteoporosis risks you can change:

- using certain medicines, such as steroids and anti-seizure medicines, for a long time (**Important:** Do not stop taking **any** medicine without talking to your health care provider.)
- having low estrogen levels (women) or low testosterone levels (men)
- not getting regular exercise
- smoking cigarettes
- drinking too much alcohol
- not getting enough vitamin D or calcium.

Osteoporosis has no symptoms. A bone density test is the only way for your health care provider to tell if you have osteoporosis.

Before the Test

- Follow any instructions you received from your health care provider.
- You cannot have a barium study, oral contrast, or a bone scan 2 to 3 days before this test.
- If you are taking a calcium supplement, stop taking it 24 hours before the test. If your health care provider gives you other directions, please follow them.
- Wear comfortable clothing without buttons, buckles or zippers.
- Tell your health care provider and the person doing the test if you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant.

During the Test

- You will lie on your back on an exam table.
- An X-ray scanner will move back and forth above your lower spine and hips, forearm or all.
- You will need to lie still.

After the Test

- Return to your normal activities, diet and medicines as instructed by your health care provider.
- The radiologist will look at and interpret the X-rays.
- Your health care provider will receive the results of your exam. He or she will either talk with you about the results or mail you the results.

Call your health care provider if you have questions about the exam.