

Bone Densitometry

Please read this before your appointment. Feel free to ask questions.

Bone Densitometry, also known as a DXA scan (Dual X-ray Absorptiometry), is performed to identify individuals that have low bone calcium. Low bone calcium places them at risk for fractures. The spine, hip and wrist are common areas that can fracture due to thinning bone. Osteopenia is the first stage of bone loss and a more advanced stage is called Osteoporosis.

Bone Densitometry is the most effective way to measure bone mineral content. This is a fast, easy and painless exam. Knowing your risk of fracture is important. Ordinary x-rays do not show bone loss until 40% of the bone has been lost. Having a bone densitometry scan as a baseline can direct you to make changes now before a fracture has occurred. It can also prevent future fractures. Usually this exam takes 30 minutes.

You are scheduled for an exam at St. John's Hospital.

Appointment Date: _____ **Appointment Time:** _____

Questions about scheduling, call: 651-232-5500

Who should have this test?

Your doctor may order this exam because of the presence of one or more risk factors. While this exam is often done on postmenopausal women, it can be performed on men, women or young adults. A change in medications or starting a new treatment plan may require a baseline bone densitometry test. When done as a follow-up exam, changes can be monitored over a period of years.

What are some examples of risk factors?

- Loss of height.
- Early menopause
- Weight of less than 127 lbs.
- Family history.
- Ethnic background
- Nutrition – low calcium intake, eating disorder.
- Lifestyle – smoker, alcohol use, inactivity.
- Medications - such as prednisone or thyroid replacement.
- Adults with a bone fracture.

Preparation:

- Inform the scheduler if you are or might be pregnant.
- Wait two weeks if you have had a Nuclear Medicine exam, CT scan with contrast or IVP x-ray.
- Wear comfortable clothing without zippers.
- Do not wear open toed shoes or sandals. Wear tight shoes.
- No calcium tablets 24 hours prior to the exam.

How is the test performed?

Before you begin the exam, the technologist will have you fill out a brief questionnaire. Please arrive 20 minutes early. The bone densitometry table is like a long x-ray table. It is padded and comfortable. At the start of the exam, the technologist will measure your height and weight. This information is entered into the computer along with your age, sex and race. With this information, your scan can be compared to a reference group. An arm moves over you during the exam. Three scans are performed. One will be on your spine and one on each hip. A forearm scan may replace a routine scan if the patient has metal hardware in both hips or spine. Each scan takes about one minute. You need to hold still and can breathe normally.

What do the results mean?

Numbers are assigned to the scans of the spine and hips called a T-score. These numbers are compared to a range determined by the World Health Organization.

This range scores numbers of:

- 1 or higher is normal
- 1 to -2.5 is osteopenia
- 2.5 or lower is osteoporosis

Your doctor will receive a report and a copy of your scan in about five days.

Is there treatment for bone loss?

Yes, there is treatment to improve bone density. Medications and changes in diet and exercise can help to slow down bone loss. Scores on follow-up scans will measure improvement.

When the Exam Is Completed

The radiologist will study the pictures. The radiologist will then tell your doctor what was found on the pictures. Your doctor will explain the results to you. Feel free to ask questions if something is not clear to you.

Billing Information

You will receive two bills for this exam.

1. The technical fee is for doing the procedure. It will be from the HealthEast facility. If you have questions regarding this bill, call 651-232-1100.
2. The professional fee is for the radiologist's time. It will be from the radiologist's group. There will be a phone number on the bill that you may call if you have any questions regarding the charge.

Materials provided by HealthEast Patient Education Service. For 24 hour access and referral:
HealthEast Care Connection: 651/326-CARE (2273) · 1-866-326-CARE (toll free)
· www.healtheast.org