

Dryden Family Medicine

Family Practice, and Preventive Care

www.drydenfamilymedicine.com

NCQA Certified Patient Centered Medical Home and in Diabetes Care

Bone Density testing (DXA scan)

You have been asked to have a DXA (bone density) test which help to identify what your risk is for a broken bone in the future.

Please read the information below as it is good background for you, and we want to mention a few important things for you to do to be ready for your DXA:

When you come in for your test you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. Your answers are used in calculating your fracture risk.

The following are important to the quality of your bone density scan:

If at all possible, do not wear clothing that has a metal zipper in the pants or shirt.

Remove any coins, keys or metallic objects from your pockets. Avoid wearing clothing which has any metal rivets or metallic decorations on your shirt or pants. (if this is not possible let the technician know at the time of your test.)

Do not take any calcium tablets in the 2 days before your test. (If you accidentally do then let the technician know at the time of your test.)

Do not schedule your test right within a few days after another test which involves imaging using barium, or ingested/injected contrast agents.

If there any possibility you are pregnant please let us know now. If you are trying to become pregnant it would be best to do the test in the week or two after your menstrual period.

Questions and Answers on Bone density testing (The Basics)

Adapted from an article in UpToDate

What is bone density testing? — Bone density testing is one way doctors can check how strong your bones are.

As people age, their bones often become less dense—thinner and more

fragile. Over time, this can lead to a disorder called osteoporosis, which makes bones weak. People who have osteoporosis have bones that can break too easily. For example, people with osteoporosis sometimes break a bone just from falling down.

What is bone density testing used for? — Doctors do bone density testing for 2 reasons:
To see if a person has osteoporosis or is at risk for the disorder and /or
To see if treatments for osteoporosis are working

Are there different types of bone density tests? — Yes. The different types of bone density tests include:

-Dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) — This is the test we use. It is the most useful and reliable bone density test. It is a special kind of x-ray that gives off very little radiation. DXA gives reliable measures of bone density in different parts of the body, such as the spine, hip, and wrist. DXA is the best test to diagnose osteoporosis, predict the chances that you will break a bone, and check how well treatment is working.

-Quantitative computerized tomography (CT) — This is another special kind of x-ray. It gives reliable measurements of bone density in the spine. It gives off more radiation than DXA. Doctors don't use this test to diagnose osteoporosis.

-Ultrasound testing — Ultrasound can be used to measure the bone density of the heel. This test can help find out a person's risk of breaking a bone. But doctors don't use this test to diagnose osteoporosis or to follow changes in bone density over time.

What happens during a DXA test? — During DXA, you lie on a table. Then an x-ray machine scans one of your bones. The test doesn't hurt or make you uncomfortable. You don't need to take any pills or get any shots. The whole thing takes 5 to 10 minutes.

Even though DXA is a type of x-ray, it gives off *very little* radiation. During a DXA you get about the same amount of radiation that an average person gets from the environment in one day. After the test, the results are "scored."

What do the results mean? — The results of a bone density test are called "T" and "Z" scores. Of the 2 numbers, the T-score is more important. The "T-score" results in one of the final results for you:

-Normal bone density — People with normal bone density have a T-score between +1 and -1. People who have a score in this range do not usually need treatment. Still, it

makes sense for them to do things to prevent bone loss. For instance, they should eat foods rich in calcium and vitamin D, and do exercise.

-Osteopenia (also known as low bone mass) — Osteopenia is the term doctors use when bone density is lower than normal but not as low as it gets with osteoporosis. A person with osteopenia does not yet have osteoporosis but is at risk of developing it. People with osteopenia have a T-score between -1.1 and -2.4. They usually need to do things to prevent bone loss. Sometimes that means taking medicines.

-Osteoporosis — People with osteoporosis have a T-score of -2.5 or less. If you discover that you have osteoporosis, there are lots of things you can do to lower the chances that you will break a bone. For instance, you can take osteoporosis medicines and calcium and vitamin D supplements. You can also exercise.

Do I need to have bone density testing again? — If your test shows that you do not have osteoporosis, you might need to have the test again later. We will let you know. If your test does show a decrease in your bone strength your practitioner will determine what interval of time to recommend between your testings.

As always, should you have questions we have not answered feel free to question us.

