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# **Dexa Scan**

Information for patients

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You have been referred for a bone density scan. The reason for this will depend on your condition, which you will have discussed with your doctor. This leaflet explains the procedure and aims to answer the main questions you are likely to have.

## WHAT IS A BONE DENSITY SCAN?

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A bone density scan, also known as a DEXA scan, uses X-ray equipment and a computer to measure bone density. A DEXA scan looks for signs of fragile bones (osteoporosis), which have a low density. The results of the scan help to:

- estimate your risk of fractures in different bones, for example hip, wrist or bones of the spine;
- monitor how well treatment for osteoporosis is working.

The procedure is quick and painless. It involves exposing your body to a small dose of X-ray radiation.

## RISKS AND BENEFITS?

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- DEXA scans are commonly performed and safe. However, in order to make an informed decision and give your consent, you need to be aware of the possible risks and benefits.

### What are the benefits of the scan?

- Osteoporosis often does not cause any symptoms until a bone is broken. By using a scanning technique such as DEXA, we can measure bone density and identify those at risk of developing osteoporosis before someone gets a fracture.

### What are the risks?

You will be exposed to some X-ray radiation but the amount you receive isn't considered to be harmful.

The dose of radiation is extremely small (equivalent to one tenth of a standard chest X-ray).

There are limitations to the information that can be obtained from DEXA scans. Many people do have fragile bones and have fractures, even though their results don't indicate that they are at risk. This is why it's important that you and your doctor consider other risk factors when deciding whether to have treatment to help prevent fractures.

### About the procedure

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The scan will be carried out by a radiographer. He or she will explain the procedure and make sure that you are happy to go ahead with the test.

Your weight and height will be measured.

You will be taken to the X-ray room and asked to lie down on the X-ray table.

The radiographer will move you into position. The X-ray machine will slowly pass over your body.

It is important that you remain very still for these scans. The test usually takes about 20 minutes but altogether you will be in the radiology department for approximately 30 minutes.

### Preparing for your bone density scan

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- You can eat and drink as normal before the scan.
- If you take calcium supplements, do not take them for 48 hours before the scan.
- Do not wear clothes with metal buttons or zips around the spine or hips such as jeans. Avoid wearing girdles and underwired bras. You do not usually have to remove clothing.
- If you have had any hip or back surgery, tell the radiographer before your scan.

### Exclusions

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You should not have this test performed if:

- You have had an X-ray examination using contrast dye within the last three to four weeks, such as a barium enema or barium swallow.
- You have had a CT or MRI scan using oral contrast dye within the last two weeks.
- You have had a nuclear medicine scan in the past two weeks, such as a bone or thyroid scan.

Please let the department know as soon as possible if you have had a previous DEXA scan in the last two years.

## Individuals aged 10-55

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Pregnant individuals are advised not to have a DEXA scan as there is a risk that the radiation may harm the unborn baby.

If you think you may be pregnant or if your period is late, please let the radiographer know at the time of booking

You will be asked to sign a form to confirm you are not pregnant.

## What to expect afterwards?

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There will be no side effects after the scan.

When you feel ready, you will be able to go home.

## IF YOU CANNOT ATTEND

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**If, for any reason you cannot keep the appointment, please let the X-ray Department know as quickly as possible so that the appointment space can be offered to another person. Telephone 028 9068 7999.**

Name of Patient:

Appointment Date:

Appointment Time:

Referring Consultant:

Radiologist:

**If you have any queries our radiology staff will be pleased to help you: **T:** 028 9068 7999 **E:** [Xray@uic.org.uk](mailto:Xray@uic.org.uk)**