

The ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

Having a bone density scan DEXA

Nuclear Medicine

Patient Information



NHS

Introduction

Your doctor has recommended that you have a bone density scan. This is a nuclear medicine test to check your bone mineral density.

What is nuclear medicine?

Nuclear medicine helps doctors to check how well different parts of your body are working.

What is bone density scanning?

Bone density scans are a way of measuring the amount of bone in a particular area, for example the lower part of the spine or the hip. Bone density varies from person to person just like height and weight, but people with low bone density may be more likely to experience bone fractures. Doctors use these scans, together with other information, to assess the likelihood of fractures and therefore whether any treatment is needed.

Is there any risk from the radiation?

We will expose you to ionising radiation when we carry out this examination. We are all exposed to ionising radiation from naturally occurring sources such as cosmic rays, certain types of soil and rocks and even food we eat. Ionising radiation can cause cell damage that in turn, after many years, may turn cancerous. The radiation associated with your exam will therefore carry an extremely small risk which is less than 0.001%. This risk will be far outweighed by the benefits of having this exposure. **Please read the *Important points* section below. If you have any concerns, please contact us.**

What preparation do I need for my bone density scan?

There is no special preparation for the scan and it does not involve any injections. As we are using x-rays to look at the density of your bones, you should not wear anything metallic around your lower back and pelvis. You will be given an opportunity to change into a hospital gown if your clothes have metallic parts, otherwise you may wear your own clothes. You can continue to take any medication that has been prescribed for you by your doctor. It is also safe for you to take ‘over the counter’ medicines.

How is my bone density scan carried out?

The procedure is very simple and takes about 10–15 minutes. We will ask you to lie flat on the scanning couch with a support under your knees – this helps to get your lower spine into the best position for scanning. The scanner will then move over you taking pictures of the relevant areas. The scanner does not touch you or make any loud noises. The person operating the scanner will be in the room with you at all times.

Are there any side effects?

There are no side effects to bone density scanning.

What happens after my bone density scan?

Once your scan is completed you may leave the department immediately. You can eat and drink as normal.

How will I get the result of my scan?

The results of your bone density scan will be available the following day to the doctor who referred you, who will arrange to give you the results.

Important points

- Due to the nature of investigations carried out within Nuclear Medicine we advise that **you should not be accompanied by anyone who is pregnant and should not bring young children to the department.**
- We are committed to ensuring patients are free from discrimination regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. If your gender was female at birth and you are transgender or non-binary, please inform a member of staff as we legally need to rule out the possibility of pregnancy before we can go ahead with some of our examinations. This information will not be recorded or shared without your consent.
- If you are pregnant, please contact the department as soon as possible to find out if you can have this test. Generally, nuclear medicine tests are not carried out on pregnant individuals unless absolutely necessary.

Contact us

If you have any questions please contact us:

Nuclear Medicine Department

Sutton: 020 8661 3286 / 3762

Chelsea 020 7811 8541

Email: rmh-tr.rmuclearmedicine@nhs.net

Alternatively, please contact:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre
Freephone: 0800 783 7176
Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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