
Having a bone scan

Nuclear Medicine

Patient information



Introduction

Your doctor has recommended that you have a bone scan. This is a nuclear medicine test. A scan of your skeleton is taken to help your doctor find out if there are any problems in your bones.

What is nuclear medicine?

Nuclear medicine helps doctors to check how well different parts of your body are working. A small amount of a radioactive substance (tracer) is given, usually by injection into a vein. The tracer gives off gamma rays, so we can measure the distribution of that tracer in your body. This measurement is usually done using a gamma camera, although occasionally blood samples may be needed.

Is there any risk from the radiation?

The amount of radiation involved is small, and is similar to the amount used in some x-ray procedures. The benefits of the scan far outweigh any possible risk from the radiation. Your referring doctor will have considered this carefully before asking us to carry out this examination. **However, it is essential that you read the ‘Important points’ section below. If you have any concerns, please contact us.**

What preparation do I need for my bone scan?

There is no special preparation for your scan. You can eat and drink as normal. You do not need to have a full bladder.

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 scan carried out?

On arrival at the department, we will give you a small injection of radioactive tracer into a vein. This will be absorbed into your bones over about three hours. During this time you can leave the department, but you will need to drink at least two litres of fluid (such as tea, coffee and water). However, you do not need a full bladder for your scan.

Occasionally, it may be necessary to take scans while the tracer is being injected in which case you will be asked to lie or sit in front of the gamma camera. These scans take about 10 minutes. We will ask you to take off your shoes and remove jewellery and metal items from your pockets. There is no need to take off your clothes for the scan, but if any of your clothing has metal studs or buttons, you may be asked to remove it. When you return to have your scans taken three hours later, we will ask you to lie or sit in front of the gamma camera. The scan will take about 30-45 minutes.

Are there any side effects?

The tracer that we inject will not produce any side effects. You can continue with your usual daily activities. In particular it will not make you drowsy and so will not prevent you from driving a car.

What happens after my bone scan?

Once the scan is completed you will be able to leave the department immediately. You will be able to eat and drink as normal. You may go anywhere you wish, but you should avoid prolonged close contact with children for the rest of the day. This is to avoid exposing children to unnecessary radiation.

How will I get the results of my bone scan?

Your bone scan will be reported by the nuclear medicine consultant within 48 hours of completion. The results of your test will then be made available to the doctor who referred you.

Important points

- Due to the nature of these investigations, we advise that **you should not be accompanied by anyone who is pregnant and should not bring young children to the department.** With most of these investigations, the level of radioactivity will have decreased to a safe level by the time you arrive

home after the scan. However, some investigations need more specific restrictions with regards to contact with young children and these will be explained.

- If you are afraid of needles you can ask for Ametop cream/spray to be used. This is a local anaesthetic, which is placed on the skin half an hour before the injection.
Please call the Nuclear Medicine Department ahead of your scan if you would like this.
- If you are **pregnant or breastfeeding**, 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 women unless absolutely necessary, and then the dose of radioactivity will probably be reduced.

Contact us

If you have any questions please contact us:

Nuclear Medicine Department

Sutton: 020 8661 3286 / 3287

Chelsea: 020 7811 8541

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:

020 8915 6899

(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

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

References

This leaflet 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 leaflet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Freephone: 0800 783 7176

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

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