



My bone densitometry test

Like other organs in the body, bones are constantly changing. Throughout childhood and young adulthood, bones grow in strength and in size. Around the age of 30, bones reach their peak strength and then naturally become weaker with age. Osteoporosis is a condition where bones become abnormally weak to the point of breaking. This weakening may be caused by other factors that combine with age. Symptoms of osteoporosis do not occur until a lot of bone strength is lost. The most visible symptoms may include loss of height, along with curvature of the upper back. Osteoporosis also can result in a crippling and painful fracture, occurring most often in the hip, back, or wrist.



Important risk factors for osteoporosis include:

- female
- Asian or Caucasian
- advanced age
- history of bone fracture
- a small/thin frame
- family history of osteoporosis
- removal of ovaries
- early menopause
- a low calcium diet
- lack of exercise
- eating disorders
- certain medicines (*such as steroids or anticonvulsants*)
- alcohol and tobacco use
- vitamin D deficiency

What can I expect during my bone densitometry test?

The bone densitometer is like a large examination table. It is padded and comfortable. Your name, age, height, weight and ethnicity will be entered into the computer prior to scanning. This information is used to compare your results to a normal reference group. You will lie on your back, remain in your normal clothing (in most cases), though metal (belt buckles, jewelry) or thick plastic (buttons) must be removed from the region being scanned. The technician will position your arms and legs prior to scanning. You simply remain still and breathe normally throughout the test, which is painless and typically takes 10 minutes.

How does the bone densitometer work?

A bone densitometer uses low amounts of X-ray to produce images of the spine, hip, or the whole body in order to measure bone mineral. The amount of bone mineral relates directly to bone density. The spine and hip are measured because that is where most osteoporotic fractures occur.

The bone densitometer is sometimes referred to as a “dual-energy X-ray absorptiometer,” or DXA.

Where can I get more information about bone measurements and osteoporosis?

International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF) is one of the leading sources of information about osteoporosis and bone measurements.

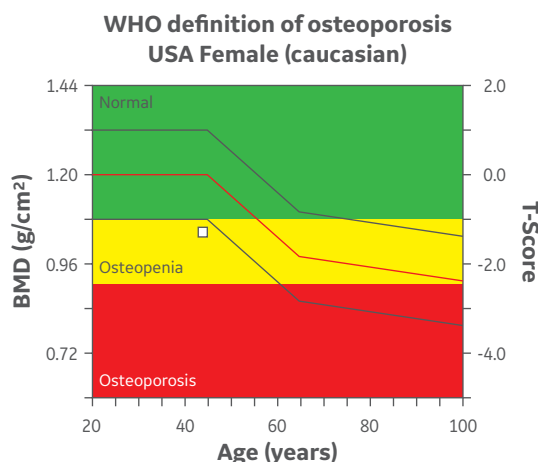
International Osteoporosis Foundation
www.iofbonehealth.org

What information will the test give my doctor?

A bone densitometry test is an aid to doctors in the diagnosis of osteoporosis. The test compares your bone to that of a “young adult” at peak bone strength (T-score).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed categories that define the amount of bone loss:

Category	T-score
Normal.....	above -1
Osteopenic (<i>low bone mass</i>)	-1 to -2.5
Osteoporotic.....	below -2.5



Your T-score combined with other risk factors, will enable your doctor to estimate what your risk of a hip fracture or other major osteoporosis-related fracture will be in the next 10 years. This information will help your doctor determine what course of action should be taken.

The bone densitometry test is also useful for monitoring changes to bone over time. Your doctor may suggest follow-up tests to determine whether there are changes.

Is the test safe?

Even though X-rays are used, the amount absorbed by the patient is only about 1/10th of that received from a chest X-ray. The X-ray dose from the bone densitometry test is comparable to the naturally occurring radiation you are exposed to in one week.*

***Important:** Although X-ray dose from the bone densitometry test is very low, please inform the technician if you are pregnant, or might be pregnant, before your test!



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