Bone densitometry (bone density), also called dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA), is an enhanced form of x-ray used to measure bone loss. This is the standard for measuring bone mineral density (BMD).

Bone densitometry is the best way to detect low bone mass and osteoporosis, a condition marked by a gradual loss of calcium resulting in thinner, more fragile bones. This exam can help determine the risk for developing fractures. This information is digitally processed, stored and displayed on a specialized computer system. The digital images and data are then studied and analyzed by a subspecialty board-certified radiologist, a doctor who has extensive training and expertise in medical imaging.

How you should prepare

- Arrive 15 minutes early to complete registration.
- Bring your insurance card and a valid photo ID.
- Do not take vitamins, calcium supplements or antacids the morning of your exam.
- Wear comfortable clothes without metal fasteners, including zippers, buttons and snaps.
- Let us know about any of the following:
  - Hip replacement or any type of lumbar spine surgery
  - Any nuclear medicine contrast studies (within 3 weeks)
  - Any barium studies (within 1 week)
  - Pregnancy - known or possible

What happens during your exam

A bone density exam typically lasts 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the body parts being examined. You will be positioned comfortably on a cushioned exam table. To capture the images, an x-ray machine is placed below you and a detector is positioned above. The detector slowly moves above your body and captures images which are displayed on a computer screen. Images are taken of two different areas susceptible to fracture or other bone damage, usually the hip and spine.

For the best quality images, you need to be as still as possible during the exam. You may be asked to hold your breath for approximately 20 seconds while the images are acquired.

After your exam

Your images will be interpreted by a board-certified radiologist. The findings will be sent to your healthcare provider. Your healthcare provider will contact you to discuss the results.

Your exam results

Your readings will be compared to reference readings taken from adults of your gender while at their peak bone mass. The result of this comparison is called a T-score, which tells you and your healthcare provider how your bone density results compare across the range. This score indicates the risk of fracture.

**T-scores indicate the risk of fracture:**
- 0 to -1 is normal
- -1 to -2.5 is osteopenia
- -2.5 indicates osteoporosis

When measured at a variety of body areas, low bone mass is the most accurate predictor of high fracture risk. When your healthcare provider has information from two areas of the body that are prone to fracture, the diagnosis can be more accurate and the treatment more specific. Your healthcare provider can offer advice about diet, lifestyle and medication based on your T-score. Treatments are available to increase your bone density and slow the rate of loss.

It is recommended that you get a baseline T-score between the ages of 30 and 40.

Vertebral Fracture Assessment (VFA)

Vertebral Fracture Assessment (VFA) is a computer-aided diagnostic tool to screen for vertebral fractures. VFA allows spine fractures to be identified with one rapid, low dose, single energy image at double the resolution of previously available techniques. Early detection of fractures can help clinicians properly stratify patients in order to prevent future debilitating spine and hip fractures.
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