

# DEXA Bone Density Scan

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## How to prepare for the test and questions about bone mineral loss

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**What a DEXA scan looks like**

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### What is a DEXA scan ?

A DEXA scan (**D**ual **E**nergy **X**-ray **A**bsorptiometry) is a special type of X-ray used to measure the mineral content of bones. A decrease (loss) in bone minerals may increase a person's risk of bone fracture. The test measures the density in the bones of the whole body, focusing on the spine and hips.

A DEXA test is more sensitive than regular X-rays so it can help to find out if there is low bone density or bone loss at an early stage. DEXA uses X-rays, so your child gets a small amount of radiation. However, the amount of radiation used in a DEXA scan is very low, less than the amount of radiation you get in one day just living on Earth.

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### What a DEXA scan looks like

Your healthcare provider has recommended a DEXA scan because your child has one or more risk factors for having low bone density. Knowing that your child has decreased bone density at an early stage can help prevent further problems. It will also allow your healthcare provider to recommend treatments and activities to help increase bone density.

Some of these risk factors for decreased bone density in young people include:

- Long-term oral steroid use (as when used in cancer treatment)
- Not getting enough calcium
- Osteoporosis in your family
- Thin body and small bone frame
- Fair skin (Caucasian or Asian race)

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#### To Learn More

- Radiology  
206-987-2133
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

#### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

### How do I prepare my child?

The day of the test, do not give your child any calcium supplements. Food with calcium, such as milk, is OK to drink. Make sure your child has not had any contrast or barium studies within 2 weeks prior to the DEXA scan. The contrast and barium interfere with the results of the test. Remove all metal on your child including any jewelry and belt buckles. Dress your child in comfortable clothes **without zippers or snaps**. Sweat pants and shirt are a good choice but we will provide clothes to change into if needed.

### How do we check in for the appointment?

Arrive 30 minutes before your scheduled appointment. Please try to be on time. Being late can affect other appointments and can delay your appointment. If you will be late, please call Radiology at 206-987-2133. Check in at the level 6 registration desk inside the Ocean entrance. After you complete registration, you will be directed to the Radiology reception area.

### What happens during the bone density scan?

At the Radiology reception desk, you will be asked to fill out a form and list all of your child's current medicines. The technologist will lead you and your child to the DEXA room.

Your child will lie on a padded table, and the detector will pass over them for the scan. The machine does not touch your child and there is no pain. Your child must lie very still for these pictures. The test takes 30 to 45 minutes.

### Does the DEXA bone density scan use radiation?

Yes, your child will be exposed to a small amount of radiation. We understand that radiation dose is a special concern for children. To lower how much radiation your child is exposed to, we customize the DEXA bone density scan based on your child's age, weight, and area to be examined.

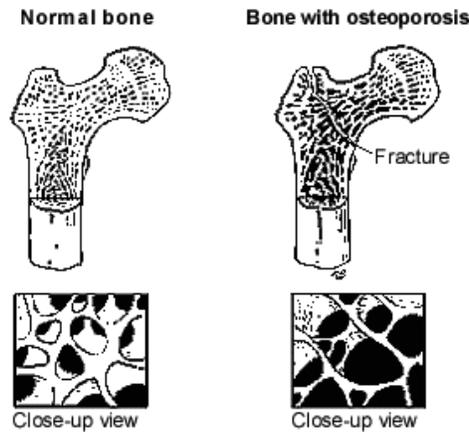
If you have questions about the exam and whether it is needed, please contact the doctor who ordered the scan for your child.

### What happens after the test?

There are no special instructions for your child to follow after the bone density scan. The images from your child's radiology procedure are typically reviewed by a radiologist within 24 hours, and a report will be sent to the doctor who ordered the test. If you have a clinic or doctor appointment scheduled, the doctor will review the results with you then. If you do not have a visit scheduled, you should call your child's doctor for the results.

### What is decreased bone mineral density?

When bone mineral density is decreased, the inside of the bones becomes porous (see the picture below). Over time, this weakens the bones and may make them more likely to break.



### How can we keep our bones strong?

The best ways to keep bones strong and prevent decreased bone mineral density include:

- Exercise — especially weight-bearing exercise like running, walking and dancing
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Get plenty of calcium
- Avoid smoking
- Drink alcohol in moderation
- Limit excessive amounts of carbonated drinks like soda