

DEXA Scan

What is a DEXA scan?

A DEXA (Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry) scan uses x-ray to measure the mineral density in bones which is referred to as bone density and bone mass. This exam can also be called a bone density test.

Why is this exam performed?

This exam is the most accurate test available for detecting osteoporosis. The DEXA scan can help doctors find out how quickly a child is losing bone mass and it can also predict the risk of fractures.

What to expect

DEXA uses low dose x-rays to give the technologist an image to analyze. The amount of x-ray energy used is much smaller than a standard chest x-ray, by a factor of 10 to 50-fold. The scans are usually of the whole body and lumbar spine, because these are the most accurate for children. Occasionally the hip and/or the forearm will also be analyzed depending on your child's situation.

Since your child will be awake for the exam, one parent or guardian (or two adults if your child has a disability) may be in the exam room. It will be helpful to make arrangements for other siblings. For safety reasons, you will be asked to step out of the exam room if there is a chance you could be pregnant.

Preparing your child is key to the success of this study. To help prepare your child, our Child Life Specialists are readily available upon request.

Your child and the accompanying adult(s) will be taken to the procedure room by a technologist and be asked to change into a gown. Your child will need to remove all clothing with metal ornamentation or removable hardware, such as jewelry or dental retainers as well. The room has an x-ray machine and a long table. If you have any questions, the X-ray Technologist will answer them prior to starting the exam.

How to prepare for the test

When more than one imaging study is scheduled (such as CT, MRI, SPECT, PET, or Fluoroscopy), the DEXA scan usually needs to be scheduled prior to these imaging studies. Schedulers will help coordinate your imaging appointments. If your child has had recent studies, the DEXA scan should be scheduled at least five days after a fluoroscopic procedure or CT scan requiring contrast and at least two days after a nuclear medicine scan.

Avoid wearing clothes with metal such as zippers, belts, buttons or grommets. Your child can be dressed in loose-fitting clothes with no metal or they can change into a hospital gown.

Calcium supplement pills and/or multivitamin pills should not be taken the morning of the DEXA scan.

If your child receives nutrition via tube feedings, you may continue with his/her routine feeding schedule. There is no reason to discontinue tube feedings for this exam.

For this 30-minute exam:

No needles or injections are used for this exam.

For the exam, your child will need to lie down flat on a padded table and lie still for 3-5 minutes as a camera passes over your child as the table slowly moves.

After the procedure

There are no after effects of the exam. If the child was in a gown, they can get dressed and are ready to leave the department.

Your child may resume his/her normal diet as ordered by your doctor after the exam.

Receiving your DEXA Scan results

To further understand these results and your child's situation, please consult with your child's ordering doctor. Typically, results are released to you via the patient's MyChart and to the ordering doctor the same day.

If you would like a CD of your child's study, please call the film library at 832-822-1202. The Radiologist's report will also be included on the CD.