

## What is a Bone Density Scan (DXA)?

Bone density scanning, also called dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) or bone [densitometry](#), is an enhanced form of [x-ray](#) technology that is used to measure bone loss. DXA is today's established standard for measuring bone mineral [density](#) (BMD).

An x-ray (radiograph) is a noninvasive medical test that helps physicians diagnose and treat medical conditions. Imaging with x-rays involves exposing a part of the body to a small dose of [ionizing radiation](#) to produce pictures of the inside of the body. X-rays are the oldest and most frequently used form of medical imaging.

DXA is most often performed on the lower spine and hips. In children and some adults, the whole body is sometimes scanned. Peripheral devices that use x-ray or ultrasound are sometimes used to screen for low bone mass. In some communities, a CT scan with special software can also be used to diagnose or monitor low bone mass (QCT). This is accurate but less commonly used than DXA scanning.

## How should I prepare?

On the day of the exam you may eat normally. You should not take calcium supplements for at least 24 hours before your exam.

You should wear loose, comfortable clothing, avoiding garments that have zippers, belts or buttons made of metal. Objects such as keys or wallets that would be in the area being scanned should be removed.

You may be asked to remove some or all of your clothes and to wear a gown during the exam. You may also be asked to remove jewelry, eye glasses and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the x-ray images.

Inform your physician if you recently had a [barium](#) examination or have been injected with a [contrast material](#) for a [computed tomography \(CT\)](#) scan or [radioisotope scan](#). You may have to wait 10 to 14 days before undergoing a DXA test.

Women should always inform their physician or x-ray [technologist](#) if there is any possibility that they are pregnant. Many imaging tests are not performed during pregnancy so as not to expose the [fetus](#) to radiation. If an x-ray is necessary, precautions will be taken to minimize radiation exposure to the baby.