

Bone mineral density test

This fact sheet tells you what a bone mineral density (BMD) test is and what is involved. Please read this sheet before having your BMD. If you have any questions, ask your doctor.

What is a bone mineral density test?

A bone mineral density test is a nuclear medicine test that measures the density (thickness) of your bones. It helps doctors diagnose osteoporosis – a disease that makes bones become brittle, increasing their risk of fractures compared with bones of normal density.

Osteoporosis happens when bones lose minerals, such as calcium, more quickly than the body can replace them.

What is involved?

Before the test, you should tell your doctor and the imaging staff if you have any allergies, are breastfeeding, are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.

For the test, you will need to remove any metallic objects that may be on you, such as coins, jewellery, watches and clothes with metal clips or zippers. Otherwise, there is no special preparation for a BMD test.

You will need to complete a questionnaire, and your medical history, including the names of the medicines you are taking, will be noted before the test.

During the BMD test, images will be taken of the bones in your spine, hip and wrist with a special camera. This camera uses a very small amount of radiation to measure the bone density. You will lie on a bed while the BMD images are taken.

The test takes less than 30 minutes to complete.

What happens after the test?

A nuclear medicine physician (a specialist doctor) assesses the BMD images and gives the results to your referring doctor. You should not have any problems after your test.

Are there any risks?

While all nuclear medicine tests involve some exposure to radiation, the amount is very small, so the risk of side effects is very low.

For more information

Nuclear medicine: Answering your questions by the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation: www.ansto.gov.au/cs/groups/corporate/documents/webcontent/mdaw/mdax/~edisp/acstest_038604.pdf

Osteoporosis Australia: www.osteoporosis.org.au

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency: www.arpansa.gov.au

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