

Imaging department

Bone densitometry / DEXA scan

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet tells you more about bone densitometry scans. Please feel free to ask our team any questions you have about the information below.

What is a bone densitometry / DEXA scan?

A bone densitometry scan is a quick, painless test that measures the thickness of your bones. This type of scan is usually done to check for osteoporosis. It is sometimes also called a bone mineral density scan (BMD), DXA or DEXA scan.

The benefit of having this scan is that it gives your doctors detailed information about the condition of your bones and how to treat them should a medication be required.

Is there anything I should do to prepare for my appointment?

Please confirm that you are attending your appointment by calling our call centre on **020 3312 6418**.

If you have had a barium study or have been injected with contrast or a radioisotope within 10 days of your DEXA scan appointment, please let us know as this might affect the scan reading. **Please telephone the number on the front of your appointment letter. We may need to give you an alternative appointment date.**

This scan **will not affect** your pacemaker, insulin pump or any metal clips etc within your body as it does not use magnets.

This test is not recommended for pregnant individuals, so if you are **pregnant** or think you may be please contact the department for advice before your appointment.

Ideal clothing to wear for a DEXA would be leggings or trousers without zips and t-shirts or loose tops. If you don't have any of the above, don't worry; we can work around this.

Underwire bras may have to be removed as the underwire and hooks can get in the way of the scanning area.

What are the benefits of having a bone densitometry scan?

The benefit of a DEXA scan is that it gives your doctors detailed information about the condition of your bones that other types of scans do not show.

What are the risks of having a bone densitometry scan?

Risks from x-rays received during a bone densitometry scan are negligible, as the radiation doses you receive are less than that you receive in an hour from naturally occurring sources.

There are usually no reactions or side effects to bone density tests and you should be able to resume your normal activities afterwards.

Are there any alternatives to a bone densitometry scan?

A DEXA scan is used to check areas of thinning of the bones, which may not yet be visible on x-ray. Other tests such as MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), CT (computed tomography) and x-rays may also help in your diagnosis, but do not give the same detail as this examination.

A DEXA scan will only have been requested by your doctor if they feel this is the best way to find out more information about your condition.

What to do on arrival to the hospital?

On the day of your appointment please book in at the Imaging Reception desk on the 3rd floor of the Queen Elizabeth Queen Mother (QEQM) Building. You will be directed to the Bone Density Scanning Room by following the **Black line** on the floor. Please take a seat in our waiting area and we will call you in when we are ready to scan you.

When entering the DEXA scanning room, we will check your date of birth and address and then ask you to empty out your pockets of coins, keys, wallet, phone etc and remove a belt if you are wearing one. We will measure your height and weight – this is just for the scanner to select the correct scanning mode for you. You will then lie on the table and we will scan the routine areas of the **Lower Spine** and **Both Hips**. In some cases, we may have to do a wrist if one of the other areas can't be scanned.

Why can't I have my bone densitometry scan at Hammersmith or Charing Cross Hospital?

St Mary's is the only site within the Imperial NHS Trust that has this type of scanner, so you need to come to Paddington to have this done.

What will happen during my scan?

The staff stay in the room with you at all times and there is **no injection** or **no feeling of being enclosed** as the scanner is an open one. The scanning time should take less than 5 minutes in total, however this can change due to the patient's condition and mobility.

You will get the results from your GP in approximately 10 to 14 days. If you have been referred by a hospital clinician you will get your results at your next follow up clinic appointment.

What happens after the scan?

You can leave the department as soon as the examination is finished. There are no after effects from this scan. You will be able to travel alone, drive and return to work, as necessary.

Is there anything I should watch out for at home?

There are no delayed side effects to the test.

What if I cannot keep my appointment?

Please contact us as soon as possible on **020 331 26418**. We can then offer this date to another patient and agree a new appointment date and time with you.

How do I get to the hospital?

Please visit the Trust's website for more information about travelling to our hospitals:
www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-locations

Contact details

Please do not hesitate to contact our imaging department if you have any queries or concerns:

- **St Mary's Hospital:** Praed Street, Paddington, London W2 1NY
Telephone: **020 3312 6418**

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

Imaging department
Published: July 2024
Review date: July 2027
Reference no: 5297
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