

DEXA

Bone Density Scan

What is a DEXA?

Bone density scanning, also called dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) is an enhanced form of x-ray technology that is used to measure bone loss. It is performed on the lower spine and hips. It can also be used on the wrist for those who have had compression fractures. It is used to diagnose osteoporosis and assess an individual's risk for developing fractures. It is quick, noninvasive and uses less than 1/10th the dose of a standard chest x-ray.

Bone Loss Risk Factors:

- post menopausal woman who is not taking estrogen.
- post menopausal woman who is tall (over 5'7") or thin (less than 125 pounds).
- personal or maternal risk of hip fractures.
- man with clinical conditions associated with bone loss.
- use of medications known to cause bone loss such as corticosteroids, dialantin, or high dose thyroid replacement drugs.
- have type 1 diabetes, kidney or liver disease, or family history of osteoporosis.
- hyperthyroidism or hyperparathyroidism.
- have had x-ray evidence of vertebral fracture or other sign of osteoporosis.
- have experienced a fracture after a mild trauma.

CPT Codes

77080 Axial Skeleton (hips, pelvis, spine)

77081 Peripheral (radius, wrist, heel)

Indications: Medicare and Major Insurance Carriers

Medicare covers bone mass measurements every 2 years for "qualified" individuals considered to be at risk for osteoporosis. A qualified individual means a Medicare beneficiary who meets the medical indications for one of the following five categories:

1. An estrogen-deficient, postmenopausal woman
2. An Individual with vertebral abnormalities
3. An Individual with known primary hyperparathyroidism
4. Some individuals receiving steroid therapy
5. Individuals receiving FDA-approved osteoporosis drug therapy

Note: If medically necessary, Medicare may provide coverage for a beneficiary more frequently than every 2 years.

Contraindications

If your patient has had a contrast exam or a barium enema they may need to wait 10 to 14 days before undergoing a DEXA test. Women who are pregnant or think they may be pregnant should inform their technologist.

How Does Your Patient Prepare?

Your patient may eat normally the day of the exam. Do not take calcium supplements for at least 24 hours before the exam. Dress comfortably avoiding garments that have zippers, belts or buttons made of metal. Your patient may be asked to wear a gown.

What Happens During the Test?

Your patient will be asked to lie on a padded table. An x-ray generator or arm is located above. To assess the spine, the patient's legs are supported on a padded box to flatten the pelvis and lower spine. To assess the hip, the patient's foot is placed in a brace that rotates their hip inward. In both cases the detector arm is slowly passed over the hip and spine generating images on a computer monitor. The patient will need to remain still for a few seconds. It is a quick and painless procedure. There are no restrictions after the exam.

Your patient can expect a 30 minute appointment with a 10 minute scan time.

The Results

A radiologist will analyze the images and send a signed report to the referring physician within 1 business day.

(Information adapted from www.radiologyinfo.org, www.cms.gov and Dr. Bill Heggen)

This manual is intended for use as merely a guideline for referring physicians and their staff only. It contains information pertaining to the most commonly ordered exams and indications. However, Iowa Radiology does not recommend any particular examination. Individual radiologist preference or patient circumstances may dictate ordering alternative studies. Although contrast codes are not needed to place an order, the following contrast codes may be used in placing orders: CT Contrast Q9967, MRI contrast A9577 and A9579.