



osteoporosis australia

BONE DENSITY TESTING

Diagnosing Osteoporosis

HOW STRONG ARE YOUR BONES?

National tollfree number

1800 242 141

www.osteoporosis.org.au

The Australian Government has provided funding to support this project.

What is a bone density test?

The medical name for this test is Dual-energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DXA). However, it is commonly known as a bone density test.

It is a short, painless scan that measures the density (strength) of your bones, usually at the hip and spine. The result from this test is called a T-score.



Your GP will assess your risk factors for osteoporosis which include your age, medical history and lifestyle factors before referring you for a test.

Bone density tests are available at most large hospitals, many private radiology centres and at nuclear medicine practices. Some specialists also offer this service.

There is a Medicare rebate for a bone density test (DXA scan) if you:

- have been previously diagnosed with osteoporosis;
- have had one or more fractures due to osteoporosis;
- are 70 years or over;
- are taking cortico-steroids or have Cushing's syndrome;
- are under 45 years and have not had a menstrual cycle for 6 months (excludes pregnancy), or are male and have low testosterone;
- have rheumatoid arthritis, chronic kidney or liver disease, overactive thyroid or parathyroid, or coeliac disease.

NOTE: You may see advertisements for other types of bone tests in chemists and shopping centres called Heel Ultrasounds. Heel Ultrasound is **not** the recommended standard test to measure your bone strength and predict your risk of fracture.

What does the test tell me?

A bone density test will give you a T-score.

The result will be in the range of:

- normal;
- osteopenia (low bone density); or
- osteoporosis.



T-score:

Normal: Higher than -1

Osteopenia: Between -1 and -2.5

Osteoporosis: -2.5 or lower

If the test shows normal

You have normal bone density. Exercise, adequate calcium intake and vitamin D are all important factors for maintaining healthy bones.

If the test shows osteopenia (low bone density)

Your doctor *may* recommend lifestyle changes to reduce risk factors that can affect bone health. See list of risk factors on opposite page. Your doctor will also recommend a follow up test in 1-2 years to monitor your bone density.

If the test shows osteoporosis

This means your bone density is low and at risk of fracture. Your doctor will probably recommend that you start treatment to stop further bone loss and prevent fractures. Lifestyle changes will also be recommended. A follow-up test is commonly conducted in one year to monitor your bone density and the effectiveness of the treatment.

Osteoporosis Treatments

If you are diagnosed with osteoporosis there are effective treatments available that help to prevent fractures, slow bone loss and in some cases build bone.

Risk Factors for Osteoporosis

1. Your Family History

- any family history of osteoporosis and fractures

2. Your Medical History

Certain conditions and medications can increase your risk of osteoporosis:

- cortico-steroids (commonly used for Asthma)
- rheumatoid arthritis
- over-active thyroid or parathyroid glands
- coeliac disease and other chronic gut conditions
- chronic liver or kidney disease

For Men:

- suffering impotence, lack of libido or other symptoms of low testosterone levels

For Women:

- if your period has stopped for 6-12 consecutive months (excluding pregnancy, menopause, hysterectomy)
- if you experience early menopause

3. Your Lifestyle

Negative Factors:

- smoking
- excessive alcohol consumption
- diet lacking in calcium
- lack of sunlight exposure may cause vitamin D deficiency
- sedentary lifestyle over many years

Positive Factors:

- adequate calcium intake is important in the daily diet
- adequate vitamin D (from limited sunlight exposure) is important for calcium absorption
- high impact, weight bearing exercise is important for bone health