

## **Bone Health:**

### **Bone Densitometry**

Bone densitometry is a type of imaging examination that measures your bone mineral density, which is a sign of bone strength. DXA (Dual X-Ray Absorption) is used most often to diagnose osteoporosis, a condition that affects millions of women and men. Osteoporosis involves a gradual loss of calcium, causing bones to thin, become more fragile, and more likely to break.

The majority of those affected are postmenopausal women. The estrogen produced in premenopausal women helps maintain bone density. After menopause begins, bone loss increases each year and can result in a total loss of 25%-30% of bone density in the first five to ten years after menopause.

This bone density test can also assess your risk for developing fractures and is effective in tracking the effects of treatment for osteoporosis and other conditions that can cause bone loss.

### **Who should have Bone Densitometry?**

Speak with your primary care provider about obtaining bone densitometry if you have any of the following:

- History of bone fractures as an adult or having a close relative with a history of bone fractures
- Vitamin D deficiency, which can occur as a result of certain medical conditions
- Excessive intake of caffeine or alcohol
- Smoking
- Weight loss or low body weight; small-boned body frame
- Early menopause or late onset of menstrual periods
- Physical inactivity
- Taking a medication known to cause bone loss
- Hyperparathyroidism and hyperthyroidism in men and women
- Low estrogen levels

### **What can I expect?**

A DXA scan is a quick, painless procedure that uses a small amount of very low dose x-rays for measuring bone loss. Measurement of the lower spine and hips is most often performed. Once in the room, this exam takes about 30 minutes. You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire regarding your bone health history just prior to the exam.



### **How should I prepare for this procedure?**

- Refrain from taking calcium supplements for at least 24 hours before the examination.
- Wear comfortable clothing and avoid garments that have zippers, belts or buttons made of metal.
- Let your technologist know if you've recently had a barium examination or have been injected with a contrast material for a CT or radioisotope scan.
- Let your technologist know if there is a possibility you are pregnant.

### **Web Resource:**

[www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org) (national osteoporosis foundation)