

Osteoporosis and bone density scans

Information for patients



What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis makes bones fragile and may cause them to collapse or break. These breaks are most common in the hip, spine and wrist.

Almost one in two women and one in five men over the age of 50 will break a bone, mainly due to osteoporosis.

Diagnosing osteoporosis – DXA scan

Osteoporosis can be diagnosed by measuring bone mineral density of the spine and hip on a DXA scan. This is a simple scan on a dual x-ray absorptiometer (DXA) machine.

There are other types of scan available, such as ultrasound of the heel, but DXA scans are the best way to diagnose and monitor osteoporosis.

The Southampton General Hospital osteoporosis centre has two DXA machines.

DXA scans only take ten to 15 minutes. The patient lies on a couch while the scan takes place. There are no injections involved and you do not have to go into a tunnel. You do not have to undress, as long as there are no metal fastenings, such as zips or metal buttons, in the area to be scanned. DXA is very safe and uses a very low dose of x-ray.

Risk factors

The most common cause of osteoporosis is a lack of oestrogen in women after the menopause. However, there are other risk factors that can increase your chances of developing osteoporosis. These include:

- A previous low trauma fracture
- Oral steroid medication
- Oestrogen deficiency, such as early menopause, hysterectomy, removal of ovaries or the loss of periods for more than six months (other than in pregnancy)

- Some medical conditions and treatments, including rheumatoid arthritis, colitis, thyroid disease, diabetes, coeliac disease, gut surgery, liver diseases, organ transplants, immunosuppressed patients, anticoagulant therapy, anticonvulsant therapy and some cancer drugs
- Slender build (with a body mass index under 20)
- Anorexia
- Family history of osteoporosis (parental hip fracture)
- Lack of exercise or immobility
- Excessive exercise, such as dancers and athletes
- Poor diet, particularly if low in calcium and vitamins such as vitamin D
- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol
- Testosterone deficiency in men

Booking a DXA scan – NHS or private

Where appropriate, GPs and hospital specialists can refer patients for a DXA scan. We will send the results to the GP or consultant who arranged the scan.

You can also arrange a private scan at Southampton General Hospital. This costs £75 and you will receive your results on the same day as your scan.

For further information or appointments contact the osteoporosis centre.

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Southampton General Hospital
Tremona Road
SO16 6YD

Telephone: **023 8120 4696**
Fax: **023 8120 8995**
Email: **oste@uhs.nhs.uk**
Website: **www.uhs.nhs.uk**

Useful contacts

National Osteoporosis Society
Helpline: **0845 450 0230**
Website: **www.nos.org.uk**

Southampton District Osteoporosis Group
Telephone: **023 8049 7644** or **023 8026 1650**

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone **023 8120 4688 for help.**

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