

# Bone Densitometry

**Bone densitometry is an easy and painless test that accurately measures your bone mass to determine if you have osteoporosis.**

## What is Bone Densitometry?

The only way to determine if you have osteoporosis before you fracture a bone is to measure your bone density. Bone densitometry (BD) measures the amount of bone in different parts of the skeleton and can predict the risk of future fractures. Saint Elizabeth's Medical Center measures bone density using dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA), which is the gold standard in bone density testing.

## How is the test done?

A BD examination is pain free and very easy. You do not have to take off your clothes and the exam takes only 10-20 minutes. The technologist will ask you to lie down on a table. The machine passes a beam of energy (a very small dose of radiation) through your spine and hip, computes your bone density, and prints out the results to be reviewed by your primary care provider.

Unlike many other medical examinations, no special preparation is required. You may wear any kind of clothing you like, but please avoid metal buttons or buckles.

During the exam you may breathe normally and rest comfortably.

### What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a bone thinning disease that causes bones to become weak and brittle. It is often called the silent disease because it develops slowly over a long period of time without symptoms or pain.

### Risk Factors

- *Being a woman*
- *The longer you live, the greater likelihood of developing osteoporosis*
- *Family history*
- *Small, thin body frame*
- *Caucasian or Asian in descent*
- *Lack of exercise and calcium*



**Bone densitometry measures the bone density of your spine and hip.**

## How does the test diagnose osteoporosis?

Your bone mass results are compared with the average bone density of healthy young adults when bone mass is at its peak. If your results show that you have osteoporosis, your primary care provider will review treatment options that are best for you.

## When should I get my bone density tested?

Currently, bone densitometry is not used as a screening tool for all women. However, your primary care provider may recommend BD if you are post-menopausal and not on HRT, or you have major risk factors for osteoporosis. If you currently are being treated for osteoporosis, BD can be used to monitor your response to treatment.

## Does insurance cover the cost of the test?

Medicare does pay for BD. Many HMOs and private insurance companies also cover this expense. Because plans vary, it is important to contact your insurance carrier to determine your specific coverage.

## How do I schedule an appointment?

Bone densitometry must be ordered by your primary care provider. If you are concerned about your risk, talk to your physician about your need for a test.

## How can I prevent or slow down the progression of osteoporosis?

- *Eat a balanced diet rich in calcium (1200-1500 mg/daily) and vitamin D (500 mg daily)*
- *Take calcium and vitamin D supplements if your diet lacks these nutrients*
- *Do weight-bearing exercises regularly*
- *Stop smoking*
- *Limit alcohol consumption*
- *Limit caffeine consumption*
- *Talk to your primary care provider about hormone replacement therapy during menopause*