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[A quick guide to DEXA for GPs referring via Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust](#)

DEXA (Dual energy X ray) scanning is the test of choice for measuring bone density.

If you suspect your patient has a vertebral collapse or Osteoporotic fracture a plain X-ray is the first diagnostic test of choice.

DEXA is recommended for patients who have the following risk factors:

[Criteria for Performing a DEXA Scan](#)

- Family history of osteoporosis (especially parental hip fracture).
- Patients with a disease known to cause osteoporosis:
 - Endocrine: hypogonadism, 1^o hyperparathyroidism and thyrotoxicosis, chromosomal disorders (e.g. Turner's syndrome) or CKD.
 - Haematological: myelomatosis, systemic mastocytosis.
 - Rheumatological: rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis.
 - Gastrointestinal: malabsorption syndrome, chronic liver disease.
- Patients with back pain who have had a plain X-ray first and do not have significant Osteoarthritis.
- If a vertebral fracture is seen on a plain X-ray.
- Women with early menopause (less than 45 years) or a history of missed periods >6/12 before menopause.
- Patients needing a base line scan prior to commencing treatment with, e.g. HRT / Zoladex , Arimidex or Oestrogen.
- Osteopenia reported on spine X-ray by a radiologist.
- Equivocal / abnormal results on a heel ultrasound or forearm DEXA scan.
- Long term anti- epileptic therapy.
- Previous low trauma fracture (vertebrae / hip / forearm) and under 75 years of age.
- Loss of height / kyphosis.
- Low BMI (e.g. eating disorder).
- HIV Infection with or without treatment.
- Other medication that may increase the patient's risk of Osteoporosis (e.g. Steroids, Warfarin and Clexane).

Repeat scans are only appropriate if there is Osteoporosis/Osteopenia, or to confirm treatment efficacy.

A previous, normal scan does not justify rescanning.

It is advisable to wait 6 months after the birth or cessation of breast feeding before performing a DEXA.

The scan will measure the density of the spine and a proximal femur (if the patient has a past history of Ca breast or Ca Prostate a forearm scan will also be performed).

Anatomical areas of known prior fracture or prior surgery will be excluded from measurement.

If treatment of osteoporosis is initiated then a repeat scan should be done after 24 months to monitor efficacy of treatment. The repeat scan should be performed on the same machine.

Your patients will have to complete a questionnaire prior to the test (either sent to them with their appointment date/time or downloaded by yourself from our website).

As the referring doctor you will receive a report in approximately 2 weeks, by post, which will also include guidelines for treatment.

In these treatment guidelines lifestyle advice may be recommended (please see below).

If the results indicate low bone density there are a number of useful lifestyle changes which can be recommended:

- A well balanced diet with increased calcium and vitamin D intake.
- Weight bearing exercise such as walking and stair climbing.
- Stretching exercises for balance, posture and agility including Pilates.
- Stopping smoking and keeping alcohol consumption less than 3 units per day.
- Reducing the consumption of colas and caffeinated drinks.
- Falls assessment where appropriate.