About Your Bone Scan

What You Need to Know and Do

A bone scan is an imaging test that uses a special camera to form images of your bones. It is known as a "nuclear medicine" test because it uses a small amount of radioactive material (called a tracer) to diagnose medical problems. The radioactive material is safe.

Bone scans are used to diagnose bone problems, like fractures, cancer, infections, or joint problems such as arthritis. They are also used to check joint replacements.

What should I do before my bone scan appointment?

You should let your technologist know if you:

- take any medication
- are pregnant or breastfeeding
- have ever had a nuclear medicine scan
- have had a recent barium study, such as a barium enema, esophagram, or upper GI (gastrointenstinal) study
- have any fractures or artificial joints
- have any allergies.

You can eat, drink, and take all of your prescribed medicines before your scan.

How long will my bone scan last?

Your bone scan may take up to half a day. While you wait, it would be good to have something to do (such as reading a book you brought with you).

What will happen when I arrive for my bone scan?

- You should arrive 2 ½ hours before your scheduled appointment time.
- Your scan may be done right away or a few hours after you arrive. If your scan is done right away, you will have a second scan in a few hours.
- During the scan, you will lie on a narrow imaging table.
- A large camera is placed close to your body. It will take pictures of your bones.
- It will take 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete the images.
- You should stay as still as you can while the camera takes the pictures. That way the best pictures can be taken.
- The table or camera may be adjusted to take more pictures.

What should I do after my exam?

- Drink plenty of water to help clear the tracer material from your body.
- You will come back for a follow-up visit. The doctor will discuss your test results during this visit. Or the doctor may discuss the test results with you over the phone.

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