

Osteoporosis: Before Your Screening

My doctor wants to see if I have osteoporosis. How is it done?

All women over 65 years, old as well as many younger women and men, should be checked for osteoporosis. The test for osteoporosis is a set of X-rays called a DEXA scan. At Michigan Medicine, they are performed at three locations:

- Taubman Center at the main U-M hospital
- East Ann Arbor Health and Geriatrics Center
- Livonia Center for Specialty Care

How can I schedule a DEXA scan?

If your doctor has ordered a DEXA scan, you can schedule it through the following:

- Call the Radiology Call Center at (734) 936-4500 and follow the prompts to speak with the **Bone Density** department.
- Self-schedule through your patient portal at <https://www.MyUofMHealth.org>

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis means bones are less dense, more fragile, and at greater risk for breaking, even with small injuries. This problem often affects bones in the hip, spine, and wrist. **Osteopenia** means bones are somewhat less dense than normal, but not as bad as in osteoporosis. A person with osteopenia is at risk of getting osteoporosis.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor may suspect that you have osteoporosis based on your risk factors, loss of height, or from an x-ray taken for some other problem. There are no

easy ways to check bone strength. Bone density accounts for about 70% of bone strength, so measuring it is a good way to predict the risk of fracture.

A DXA (dual energy x-ray absorptiometry) scan of the spine and/or hip is the best way to check bone density. A **DXA scan** uses x-rays, but instead of creating a picture, it uses a detector and a computer to calculate bone density. A DXA scan is painless and typically takes less than 10 minutes. The radiation exposure per site tested is about the same amount we get in daily life due to background radiation from space. Ultrasound of the heel or wrist (sometimes offered at health screening fairs) can also provide helpful information about bone density. You should discuss such results with your doctor to see if you need further testing.

Among several numbers produced from a DXA scan, T-scores are often used. A T-score compares your bone density to that of healthy young adult.

Here is what T-scores mean:

- -1 or greater is normal
- Between -1 and -2.5 is considered osteopenia
- -2.5 or lower is osteoporosis

Deciding when to treat depends on both your T-score and your risk factors.

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