Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Having a Dexa Scan

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Having a DEXA Scan

Patient Information

Radiology Department

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Introduction

We hope that this information will help you to understand a little more about this procedure.

If you have any further questions, please don’t hesitate to ask us.

What is a DEXA Scan?

DEXA stands for ‘Dual Energy X-ray Absorptiometry’.

A DEXA scan uses X-rays and a computer to measure your bone mineral density. From the information collected during the scan, we can tell whether you are at risk of having or developing Osteoporosis (a thinning of the bones).

DEXA Scanner



Will I be shut in the scanner?

No. Although the DEXA scanner doesn’t look like an ordinary X-ray machine, it is quite open with a narrow scanning arm supported over the bed. You will not have to lie in a tunnel and the Radiographer is present in the room during the scan.

What must I do in preparation?

There is no special preparation necessary for your DEXA scan.

Please try to wear clothes that do not have fasteners, buckles, hooks, poppers, zips, or boning (as sometimes found in girdles, corsets, etc.). If you wear a surgical corset and cannot manage without it, we may ask you to remove it before the scan.

If you are unable to put weight on your leg or walk comfortably, please let the department know before you attend for the scan.

Can I continue with my tablets?

There is no need for you to break with your normal routine for this scan.

You can continue to take all your tablets or medication as normal. If you have any worries at all, please contact your GP.

Can I bring someone with me?

A relative, partner or close friend is welcome to accompany you to your DEXA scan but will be asked to wait outside the scan room.

What happens when I arrive?

When you arrive at the department, located in the Radiology Department at the Thomas Linacre Centre, please give your name in at the reception window where your personal details will be checked. You will then be asked to take a seat in the waiting area. The Radiographer will call you into the scanning room as soon as it is ready for you.

Please DO NOT enter the scanner room unless invited to do so by a member of staff.

What is involved?

You will not see or feel anything unusual during the scan, although the bed and scanning arm will move under the Radiographer's control.

Before the scan starts, your height and weight will be measured in order for the computer to accurately calculate your bone density.

You will then be asked to lie on your back with your legs supported for the duration of the scan (about 10-15 minutes). During the scan the scanner arm will pass over your spine and hips several times. These are the areas which will show the early signs of Osteoporosis and are most useful to us, even though they may not be the site of your symptoms.

You will not have to hold your breath for the scan, just breathe normally and relax. After the scan you are free to go home.

Are there any side effects?

There are no side effects. You may eat and drink as normal. The procedure will not affect your ability to drive or operate machinery.

How do I get the results?

You will **not** be given the results of your DEXA scan before you go home as they take a little time to calculate.

If you were sent by your General Practitioner (GP), then you can contact them for the result. The Radiographer can advise you how long this is likely to take. If you were sent by a hospital specialist, the results will be sent to them, and they will contact you. If you already have an outpatient appointment booked, you should keep this.

What are the risks of radiation?

Although X-rays are used for this scan, the radiation dose is so low that the Radiographer can safely stay in the room with you. The radiation exposure from a DEXA scan is very small and is equivalent to approximately one day's natural radiation from the atmosphere. In comparison, a single chest X-ray amounts to about five days' worth of natural radiation exposure from the atmosphere.

With modern X-ray equipment, the radiation dose given is minimal and there are very strict working practices by which we are legally obliged to abide. The staff working in this department are constantly monitored and checked, as well as the equipment, which is calibrated daily.

Please be assured that we give the lowest radiation dose possible, and you are far more likely to benefit from this X-ray than suffer any harm.

However, if there is any possibility that you may be pregnant, please inform the X-ray Department before you come for your appointment (see contact details at the end of this leaflet).

If you have any questions

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions either before, during or after the examination. You can ask a member of staff or call us on the following telephone number:

Appointments queries: **01942 822398**

Please note that our DEXA scanner table has a patient weight limit of 31 stones or 200kg. If you know that you weigh more than this, it is important that you telephone the department.

If you are unable to put weight on your leg or walk comfortably, please let the department know before you attend for the scan.



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