

Bone densitometer fact sheet

What is a bone densitometry test?

A bone densitometry test is an aid to doctors in the diagnosis of osteoporosis. The test compares a patient's bone quality to that of a "young adult" at peak bone strength (T-score). It also compares the results to people of the patient's same age, called "age-matched" (Z-score). This information, along with other factors, helps doctors gauge the risk of osteoporotic fracture. A T-score of -1 equals a one "standard deviation" decrease from young adult (which is about 10%). The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed categories that define the amount of bone loss:

C t	T-
Nabove -1
O t n (low bone mass)-1 to -2.5
O t tbelow -2.5

How is a bone densitometry test performed?

The bone densitometer is like a large examination table. The patient will be asked to lie on their back. In most cases patients are allowed to stay in their normal clothing, and the test typically takes about ten minutes. Even though x-rays are used to perform a bone density test, the amount absorbed by the patient is only about 1/10th of that received from a chest x-ray. The x-ray dose from the bone densitometry test is comparable to the naturally occurring radiation we are exposed to in one week.*

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