



# Having a bone scan as an outpatient

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**A bone scan is a nuclear medicine test that looks at the activity of some cells in your bones. A small amount of a radioactive material which collects in bone shows areas where bones are breaking down and being repaired. This breakdown and repair is a normal way of keeping your bones healthy, but in some diseases these processes go wrong and this can be seen clearly on a bone scan. The bone scan can be used to look for many different things, such as injury, infection, cancer and other causes of bone damage.**

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## Is it safe for me to have the scan?

For this scan it is necessary to inject a small amount of radioactive tracer, called a radio-pharmaceutical, in order to take the pictures. The small risk from this radiation dose is outweighed by the information that will be gained by having the scan. There is a table attached to the end of this leaflet which shows some common radiation exposures to put this into context. Ask if you want any more information. All investigations are vetted to make sure this is the appropriate test for you. If you don't understand why you need to have this scan please speak to the doctor who referred you.

## For female patients

If you know that you are pregnant, or there is any chance that you may be pregnant, then please contact the department where you will be having the scan. **Do this as soon as possible as the scan can be postponed if it is not urgent. Also contact the department if you are breastfeeding**, as we may give you special instructions.

## Preparation for your scan

There are no special preparations for a bone scan. You can eat, drink and take any medicines as normal.

## Your injection

A small amount of radioactive tracer will be injected into a vein in your arm or hand. You may have had a blood test in the past. This is much the same. You will feel the 'pin-prick' of the needle a bit, but that is all. After the injection you will be asked to wait for 2½ - 3 hours before the pictures can be taken. During this time you can leave the department if you wish. You should drink plenty of non-alcoholic liquids and go to the toilet as often as you need. This helps to get good pictures of your bones. Please let the staff know if you are on fluid restriction for any reason. You may eat normally.

## Your scan

Before the scan you will be asked to go to the toilet to empty your bladder. The scan is taken by a special machine called a gamma camera. This is not a tunnel, but the camera detectors will come close to you. There are sensors which stop it moving if it gets too close so it won't touch you. The scan may look at all of your body, or only the bones that your doctor is interested in – like your legs or arms. You will not be left on your own – there will always be someone immediately available. You will be asked to lie flat on your back on a special couch. The scan usually takes 15 minutes. Sometimes, additional images may be needed which may include having a CT scan. This takes another 20 minutes. It is very important that you keep still during the images. If you think that you will find this difficult please speak to someone from the Medical Physics Department before your appointment.



## After your scan

It is very unlikely that you will feel any side-effects after the scan, but if you think that you have please let the Medical Physics Department know. You may continue all your normal activities unless you have been advised otherwise. After your scan there will be some radioactivity left in your body but this will not present a significant risk to other people around you. The radioactivity in your body will soon disappear, but if you continue to drink plenty of liquids and empty your bladder frequently, this will help clear the radioactivity more quickly.

## Your results

Your scan will be looked at by a specialist doctor, who will issue a report. The report is sent to the doctor who requested your scan rather than to your GP. This is because the doctor who requested your scan will have all the results from other tests and will be able to tell you how the result of your bone scan affects your care.

## Contacting us

Medical Physics Department, Level 1 North Block, Monday to Friday, 9.00 am to 5.00pm. If you have any questions about your treatment, please ask the staff looking after you or telephone 0118 322 7355 or email: [rbb-tr.physics@nhs.net](mailto:rbb-tr.physics@nhs.net)

The table below is a simple guide to the levels of radiation risks for various examinations. These are measured in millisieverts (mSv).

<b>Source of exposure (using RBFT local diagnostic reference levels (DRLs) for Nuclear Medicine)</b>	<b>Dose</b>
Having a chest x-ray	0.014 mSv
Taking a transatlantic flight	0.08 mSv
<b>Whole body bone scan</b>	<b>2.9 mSv</b>
<b>UK average annual radiation dose</b>	<b>2.7 mSv</b>
CT scan of the chest – CT scan of whole spine	6.6 mSv – 10 mSv

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**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Physics & Clinical Engineering Department, April 2024. Next review due: April 2026

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