



DXA (Dual-energy X-ray Absorptiometry)

What is DXA?

DXA stands for "Dual-energy X-ray Absorptiometry." It is a test that uses two different photon energies, or x-ray beams, to measure bone and soft tissue.

It is a fast and accurate way to measure how strong bones are (known as bone density) and how much of the body is made up of fat, muscle and bone tissue (known as body composition). Please note: Body composition is not measured on everyone having a DXA scan.



What are the risks of a DXA scan?

DXA scans are painless. There are no shots or medications involved in the test. The scan takes place in a private room with an open machine – you do not have to be placed inside a tube!

The dose of radiation used in a DXA scan depends on the type and number of scan(s) you are having. However, for all scan types, the dose is *very low*. Even for many scans, the dose is small when compared to the amount of radiation a person living in the U.S. is exposed to every day.

Your technologist reviews radiation information with you before the scan(s). If you have any concerns beforehand, please talk to your doctor or contact us at the DXA Center at 617-355-3789.

When should I schedule my DXA scan?

You should schedule a DXA scan at least 14 days after a nuclear bone scan or any tests that involve contrast materials. Tests that use contrast materials include:

- Barium swallow or enema
- Upper and lower GI
- Some CT scans

If you have a question about a test that you are having, please ask the technologist when you plan your visit.

How do I prepare for the scan?

Follow the below guidelines to prepare for a DXA scan.

Food, Drink and Medicines

Since calcium (which is in your bones) is what the DXA scan is measuring, eating or drinking anything with calcium in it may change scan results.

✗ Do not eat foods rich in calcium for 3 to 4 hours before your DXA scan. Foods rich in calcium include:

- Cheese
- Yogurt
- Milk
- Dark, leafy greens



✗ Do not take calcium pills, vitamins, or TUMS the day of your DXA scan.

- ✓ You **can** drink water and other clear liquids before the scan.
- ✓ Take all medicines as far before the scan as the doctor allows.

Female Patients

All female patients who have begun their period OR are age 12 or older must give a urine sample. The sample is used for a pregnancy test, which is required before the scan can take place.

Your physician may waive the pregnancy test under special circumstances only.

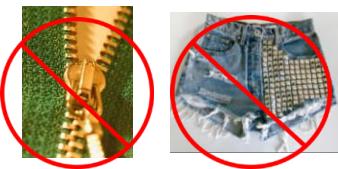
The urine sample is taken on the floor, so **please do not collect a urine sample at another bathroom in the hospital** (this is a hospital policy).

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Metal and Jewelry

Metal objects impact the scan. We ask that you not wear clothes that have:

- Snaps
- Buttons
- Zippers
- Any other metal material



Please note: You may still be asked to change if the technologist sees anything on your clothes that may affect the scan.

For Female Patients:

- Female patients may be asked to **remove their bra if it has an under wire.**
- **Sports bras can be left on**, as long as they do not have any hooks on them.

All jewelry must be removed from parts of the body being scanned. This includes all body piercings. If there is a piercing that absolutely cannot be removed, tell the technologist as soon as you arrive to the appointment.



What should I expect when I arrive to the appointment?



Please arrive to your appointment on time.

When you arrive for your appointment, the following happens:

1. You change into clothes appropriate for the scan and give a urine sample (if applicable).
2. The nurse or technologist measures your height and weight before taking you to the DXA room.
3. The technologist reviews the test with you, and answers any questions you may have before the scan.

What happens during the DXA scan?

Parents, Family Members, and Friends

Parents, family members and friends are asked to wait in the waiting area during the scan; however, a parent or guardian may go with younger patients into the DXA room. An x-ray shield protects them from radiation exposure. **Pregnant women cannot be in the room during the exam.**

We cannot provide care for siblings or other young children during the exam, so please do not bring them with you unless you have another adult with you who can watch them.

Patients

During the DXA scan, the following happens:

1. The technologist positions you on the bed. Each scan takes 1 to 6 minutes, depending on the scan type.
2. You are asked to lie completely still and not talk for the whole scan; however, you may breathe normally throughout the test.

You should allow roughly 1 hour for the DXA appointment. We do our best to get you in and out as quickly as possible, while allowing plenty of time to answer questions and ensure comfort.

When and how will I receive my results from the scan?

You will not get any results from the DXA scan the day of the test. The scan must be reviewed by the technologist, and then a doctor specializing in DXA.

After the review process is done, results are sent to your primary care provider, or to the doctor who ordered your DXA scan(s). This doctor will tell you your results.

Whom can I call if I have questions?

If you have any questions or concerns about the exam, please contact the DXA Center at (617) 355-3789. You may need to leave a message; someone will return your call as soon as possible.

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How do I get to the DXA Center?

The DXA Center is located on Boston Children's Main Campus on Longwood Avenue. **The DXA Center is located in the Pavilion Building on the 6th floor.**

Directions to the DXA Center

1. After coming into Boston Children's Main Lobby, take a left to the main staircase. An elevator is also located to the right of the stairs.

2. Take the stairs or elevator to the 1st floor.
3. Follow the signs to the Farley Building.
4. Take the Farley Elevators, located on your first right, up to the 6th floor.
5. Take a left out of the elevator.
6. Go down the hall to the CTSU reception desk.
7. You will be directed to the waiting area.

A [Spanish](#) version of this is available from your provider.