



**Royal National  
Orthopaedic Hospital**  
NHS Trust



A Patient's guide to

# Having a bone scan

This leaflet explains more about having a bone scan including the benefits, risks and any alternatives. It also provides information on what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any further questions, please speak to your doctor, nuclear medicine radiographer or nurse.

## **What is a bone scan?**

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.

Please allow for 3-4 hours for the test to be fully completed.

## 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 radiopharmaceutical, in order to take the pictures. The radioactive dose you receive from this scan is small (similar to a CT scan) and the associated risks are minimal. The radiology staff are responsible for making sure that your dose is kept as low as practicable and that the benefits of having the bone scan outweigh any risks.

A doctor will have checked the request to make sure this is appropriate and justified for you.

If you have any concerns or would like further information, please contact the Nuclear Medicine Radiographers in the scanning department.

If you don't understand why you need to have this scan please speak to the doctor who referred you.

## Pregnancy

Radiation can be harmful for an unborn baby. If you know that you are pregnant, or there is any chance that you may be pregnant, then please contact the department as soon as possible as the scan can be postponed if it is not urgent.

Also contact the department if you are breast-feeding as we may need to give you special instructions.

## Preparation before for your scan

Please contact the department if you are urinary incontinent or require the use of a hoist as we may need to give you special instructions.

To prepare for your bone scan we would like you to hydrate from the afternoon before your appointment with water, you may go to the toilet as normal. You can eat and take any medicines as normal.

If you self-catheterise we will require you to bring your own supply of catheters.

Unfortunately we are unable to offer childcare facilities. If you have young children or babies please do not bring them to your appointment.

## Giving my consent (permission)

The radiographer will ask you if you are happy for the bone scan to go ahead. This is a form of verbal consent and may only involve the radiographer checking you are booked for the correct procedure. If you do not wish to have the scan or are undecided, please ask the radiographer so that they can answer any questions you may have.

Remember, it is your decision. You can change your mind at any time and your wishes will be respected. However, not having the bone scan may delay your diagnosis as the doctors may not have all the needed information.

## What will happen during your scan.

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 and it is similar to that. The 'pinprick' of the needle may hurt a bit, but that is all.

After the injection you will be asked to wait for about 2 to 3 hours before the pictures can be taken. During this time you may be allowed to leave the department if you wish.

You will be asked to drink plenty of water and go to the toilet as often as you need. This helps to get good pictures of your bones. You may eat and take medication normally.

Just before the scan you will be asked to go to the toilet to empty your bladder.

You will not have to get undressed, but you will be asked to remove any metal objects like braces, jewellery and belts before you lie on the bed of the scanner.

The scans are taken by a special machine called a gamma camera. You will be asked to lie flat on your back on a special couch. The scans usually take about 30 minutes and it is very important that you keep still during this time. If you think that you will find this difficult please speak to the nuclear medicine department before your appointment.

The scanner is not a tunnel, but the camera detector will come close to you. There are sensors in the camera which stop it moving if it touches anything, so it cannot hurt you.

The scans 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.

Sometimes additional pictures may also be taken with an X-ray CT scanner in order to localise any abnormality better. These extra pictures only take a few minutes.

## **What happens after your bone scan?**

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.

However, for the rest of the day, we suggest that you try to keep any time that you spend with pregnant women, babies and small children as short as possible; but there is no need to stop giving children essential love and care.

The radioactivity in your body will soon disappear, if you continue to drink plenty of liquids this will help clear the radioactivity more quickly.

## Travelling abroad

It is perfectly safe for you to travel abroad after your scan, but many airports and sea ports are now equipped with very sensitive radiation detectors. So it is possible that the very small amount of radioactivity left in your body could set off a detector as you pass through security. Therefore, if you intend to travel abroad within a week following your scan, it could be helpful to take with you something to explain that you have recently had a nuclear medicine scan. This could be your appointment letter or some other official confirmation from the department where you had your scan.

## When will I get the results?

Your bone scan will be looked at by a specialist doctor, who will issue a report. The report will be 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.

## What should I do if I have a problem?

It is very unlikely that you will feel any side-effects after the scan, but if you think that you have please let the nuclear medicine department know.

You may continue all your normal activities unless you have been advised otherwise. If you feel your condition has changed, or you need further medical advice before receiving your results, please make an appointment with the doctor that referred you, or in an emergency, go to your local accident and emergency (A&E) department.

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

Telephone: **020 8909 5439 (PALS)**

Email: **[rnoh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rnoh.pals@nhs.net)**

Telephone: **020 8909 5717 / 5439 / 5741** (complaints)

Email: **[rnoh.complaints@nhs.net](mailto:rnoh.complaints@nhs.net)**

## NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

Telephone: **111**

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about coming for your bone scan, please contact the x-ray reception on **020 8909 5801** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).





If you would like this leaflet translated into another language/large print, please contact the Quality Team on 020 8909 5439.

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