



Bone Density Testing: How Often Should Older Women Get the Test?

Experts agree that most post-menopausal women should get their first bone density test at age 65. Bone density tests, called DXA (dual x-ray absorptiometry) tests, detect bone loss that could lead to osteoporosis. Some women might need the test before they reach age 65 if they have risk factors for osteoporosis (such as smoking, long-term use of steroid medicines, or a family history of osteoporosis). But how often should women be retested?

A new study suggests that some women may not need another bone density test for 15 years, if they have normal or only slightly decreased bone mineral density (BMD). The findings of the study do not apply to women age 67 or older who have osteoporosis, a history of hip fracture or spine fracture, or who are currently taking osteoporosis medications.

The Endocrine Society, a prestigious medical organization, reviewed the study and reports that the ideal timing of repeat BMD testing should be individualized, based on how likely each woman is to lose bone mass over time. The Society advises against a “one size fits all” approach to deciding how often a woman should have BMD testing. You should talk with your doctor about your BMD measurements and your risk factors for osteoporosis. You and your doctor can then decide on the best time to get your next DXA test.

If you are 65 or older and have not yet had a DXA test, talk to your doctor about getting one. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services covers DXA testing every two years. Some women should be screened more often, such as those with moderate or advanced osteopenia (bone loss that is not as severe as osteoporosis) and those who have just started or changed osteoporosis therapy.

The Society’s full statement can be accessed at: www.endo-society.org/advocacy/policy/index.cfm.

The Hormone Foundation, the public education affiliate of The Endocrine Society, serves as a resource for the public by promoting the prevention, treatment and cure of hormone-related conditions through outreach and education. For more information about the Foundation and to download free patient publications on thyroid cancer and related conditions, visit www.hormone.org.

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