

Further investigations following your recent fracture

The Bone Health / Fracture Liaison Service would like to refer you for further investigations following your recent fracture. The information below explains why we wish to do this and what this entails.

Why are you referring me for further assessment?

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends that all patients between the ages of 50-75 sustaining a lower impact/fragility* fracture be referred for further investigations to screen for a condition called osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis is a condition where your bones become less dense and less strong, making you more likely to break a bone than the average adult. Osteoporosis is almost always symptomless and breaking a bone is often the first sign of this condition, so as a precaution we would like to carry out some tests.

There are many conditions and lifestyle choices that can increase our risk of osteoporosis but family history / genetic factors can also play a big part. Unfortunately, some patients can have osteoporosis without having any known risk factors or a family history.

Osteoporosis is a common cause of hip / spinal fractures later in life, and by identifying the condition earlier, we can help to prevent these fractures in the long term. Although osteoporosis is often thought of as an 'older person's disease', it can affect patients as early as aged 50. Early diagnosis can significantly improve patient outcomes. Osteoporosis is a highly treatable condition and by identifying patients with the early stages of osteoporosis, we can reduce the risk of fractures (particularly hip and spinal vertebra) as we age.

**Lower impact or fragility is what we call fractures caused by falling from the height of three standard stairs and below.*

Which investigations will I need and why?

In most patients age 50-74, we refer patients for a blood test and a bone density (DEXA) scan.

- 1. Blood test:** This looks for conditions that could be affecting the way in which your body makes new bone (including your kidneys, liver and thyroid). The blood test also checks the levels of some of the important nutrients your body needs for healthy bone formation, such as calcium and Vitamin D. Insufficient levels of Vitamin D in particular can have a significant impact on bone health and fracture risk.

Sometimes these blood results highlight something of which you may not have already been aware. If this is the case, please be assured that we will inform you and your GP and help to make a plan going forward.

2. **A bone density or DEXA scan:** A bone density scan (DEXA) is a simple painless low-dose X-ray test that checks the density of the inside of our bones to calculate their strength and longer-term fracture risk.

DEXA machines usually scan bones in the lower spine and hip, two of the main areas at risk from osteoporotic fractures. This is the most reliable site to check, even if they are not the location of your recent fracture. A DEXA scan will take between 10 and 20 minutes and **does not involve being enclosed in a mechanical tunnel**. Generally, you do not have to remove clothing but clothes with metal should be avoided (metal belts are not advised but underwired bras are okay). You have to be able to get up onto the table but no other physical activity is required for the scan.

The scan compares your bones to a reference range of young healthy adults with average bone density, and to other people your own age and similar demographic (e.g. gender, ethnicity). The difference between this average and your bone density is calculated and you are given a score. This score will tell us if your bone density falls into one of three categories: normal bone, osteopenia (reduced density but not osteoporosis), or osteoporosis.

If you consent to the bone density scan, the Berkshire Independent Hospital will be in touch with an appointment in due course. They will usually contact you by telephone and will leave a voice message if you are initially unavailable to make a booking.

Berkshire Independent Hospital, Swallows Croft, Wensley Road, Coley Park,
Reading RG1 6UZ Tel: 0118 902 8000 <https://www.berkshireindependenthospital.co.uk/>

Your results

When we have the results of your blood tests and DEXA scan, we will be in touch with you and your GP. If we recommend any further investigations or treatment, we will let you know at this point. It is of course your decision (with your GP) whether to start any form of treatment or not, if this is advised.

If you receive the results and still have questions or wish to discuss your options further, you can contact us via telephone or email. Our contact details will be at the top of the page in all of our correspondence.

Sometimes, we may contact you after you have had your blood test but are still awaiting the DEXA scan. If we come across anything in your blood test that requires further intervention or if the blood test needs to be repeated, we will be in contact to discuss these findings.

Advice on maintaining bone health

The blood test and bone density scan allow us to tailor our advice to you as an individual; however, **some advice is important to all of our patients**. To maintain strong healthy bones, it is important that you do **regular weight-bearing exercise**. This can be in the form of walking, jogging, Pilates, yoga, gardening or even simply walking around the house.

We also strongly recommend a **healthy, balanced diet**, rich in vitamins and minerals. Alcohol and caffeine consumption should remain in moderation and smoking is strongly discouraged for good bone health.

Vitamin D plays an essential role in bone formation / strength as well as many other important body functions. A large number of the UK population are deficient in Vitamin D and recent Department of Health guidelines advise we should all be working to maintain Vitamin D levels year round. This can be achieved by 10 minutes of sunlight exposure per day (May-September). Between October and April, when there is not so much sunlight, Vitamin D should be supplemented through diet or tablets. The Royal Osteoporosis Society website has a handy Vitamin D-rich food chooser <https://theros.org.uk/information-and-support/bone-health/vitamin-d-for-bones/vitamin-d-rich-food-chooser/>. You can purchase Vitamin D supplements over the counter at your local pharmacy – ask the pharmacist for advice.

Falls

Regardless of age, if you are a patient who has either experienced multiple falls, or you have developed a fear of falling following this fracture, we have dedicated services to help reduce falls and improve your confidence. We can refer you for specialist strength and balance classes in the community or arrange for a one to one falls assessment with experienced colleagues in your home. If you would like to take advantage of this, please get in touch using the details below.

Further information

The Royal Osteoporosis Society website has lots of useful information and advice, visit <https://theros.org.uk/information-and-support/fact-sheets-and-leaflets/>

Contacting us

Fracture Liaison Service / Bone Health Team:

Tel: 0118 322 5111 (Extension 3542)

Email: rbft.fls@nhs.net

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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

Fracture Liaison Service/Bone Health Team (Rheumatology), February 2023

Next review due: February 2025