

Consider bone test for many conditions, medications

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When it comes to bone health, age and family history of osteoporosis aren't the only reasons to consider testing for fracture risk.

Nelson Watts, MD, UC Health [bone](#) and [osteoporosis](#) expert and professor in UC's endocrinology, diabetes and metabolism division, says there are a number of diseases and prescribed medications that should have patients and their physicians considering bone [mineral density](#) testing.

Bone mineral density tests measure the density of minerals, like calcium, within your bone. These tests can predict fracture risk and are recommended for healthy women 65 and older and healthy men 70 and older.

The test is also recommended for younger people at an increased risk for osteoporosis, which, Watts says, could include a large portion of our population with certain [medical](#) conditions or those taking medications known to lead to bone loss.

Watts recommends that patients be referred for bone mineral density testing for the following:

- Prolonged use of glucocorticoids, a type of steroid medication. These medications, prescribed for a number of pulmonary, gastroenterology, dermatological and immunological conditions, as well as transplant patients, can lead to bone loss, fracture and osteoporosis.

- Use of some drugs for breast cancer (specifically aromatase inhibitors) and androgen suppression therapy used for prostate cancer. Both can affect bone health.
- Use of specific drugs for epilepsy, depression, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and acid secretion suppression. Certain medications for these conditions can lead to bone loss.

A common test used to evaluate bone mineral density is a DXA scan. DXA stands for dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry. This test does involve a small exposure to radiation, but Watts points out that the amount of radiation involved is similar to what you might experience during a transcontinental airline flight.

A DXA scan takes approximately five minutes, with the entire appointment lasting about 30 minutes, with most of the time used for registration and check-out. Reports are then shared with the ordering physician.

"DXA scans are great tools for evaluating the effects of disease and medications on [bone health](#)," says Watts. "The results can provide clues about future risk for fracture and can help patients and their physicians decide what steps to take to prevent fractures from occurring."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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