Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Your Bone Scan

This information explains what to expect during and after your bone scan at MSK.

About bone scans

A bone scan can be done for many reasons. You may have a bone scan to check for:

- Signs of cancer.
- Arthritis (joint swelling).
- An infection in your bones.

At MSK, a bone scan is usually done to see if cancer has spread to your bones.

A bone scan has 2 parts:

- A radioisotope (RAY-dee-oh-I-suh-tope) injection (shot)
- The bone scan

After the radioisotope injection, you will wait for about 3 hours before having the scan. Your bone scan will take about 5 hours total.

What to do before your bone scan

During your bone scan, you will need to lie still on the scan table for 30 to 45 minutes. If you think you'll be uncomfortable lying in one position for a long time, talk with your healthcare provider. They may prescribe pain medicine to help. If they do, bring it to your appointment.

If you're very claustrophobic, talk with your healthcare provider before your

appointment. If you have medicine for claustrophobia (fear of closed spaces), bring it to your appointment.

You will wait about 3 hours between your radioisotope injection and your bone scan. You may want to plan something to do, or bring something to do to help pass the time.

What to do the day of your bone scan

Things to remember:

- Wear comfortable clothing.
- Do not wear any metal objects. Be prepared to remove coins, keys, and all jewelry, including body piercings.

If you're staying in the hospital, a staff member will bring you to the Molecular Imaging and Therapy Service for your scan. The Molecular Imaging and Therapy Service is also called Nuclear Medicine.

Radioisotope injection

Before your scan, you will get an injection of a substance called a radioisotope. This helps your healthcare provider to see differences in your bones, such as areas of disease or infection.

A Nuclear Medicine healthcare provider will review your medical history with you. Tell them if your healthcare provider prescribed pain medicine to help with pain or discomfort during your scan. They will tell you when to take it. Then they will inject the radioisotope into a vein in your arm.

The radioisotope has a small amount of a radioactive material. This material will not harm you. You will not need to limit your contact with other people after the injection.

If you're breastfeeding, you will need to stop for 4 to 24 hours (1 day) after your bone scan. Read the "Instructions for people who are breastfeeding" section of this resource to learn more.

Waiting period

After the radioisotope injection, you will wait for about 3 hours. This gives the radioisotope time to reach your bones. Drink at least 2 (12-ounce) glasses of liquids while you're waiting. This will help you urinate (pee), which will help remove any radioisotope not absorbed by your bones.

You can spend your waiting time however you'd like. You can eat and drink or have other tests done. If you're an inpatient, a staff member will bring you back to your room while you wait. If you're not an inpatient, you can wait in the waiting area or leave the hospital. If you leave the hospital, we'll tell you what time to come back. **It's important to come back on time.**

Bone scan

A Nuclear Medicine technologist will use a special scanner to take pictures of the inside of your body. This is an open scanner and is much different than an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scanner. The scanner is made up of 2 large, flat surfaces. These will be either above or next to you during the scan.

About 3 hours after your injection, go back to the Nuclear Medicine department. Tell the staff member at the front desk that you're back for the second part of the bone scan. The technologist will ask you to use the restroom to urinate. Then they will bring you to the scanning room.

The Nuclear Medicine technologist will help you lie on your back on the scanning table. Once you're comfortable, your technologist will slowly move the scanner over your body from head to toe. This will take about 30 to 45 minutes. The technologist will stay in the room with you the whole time. Tell them if you're feeling any pain.

Once the scan is finished, you will stay in the scanning room while your healthcare provider reviews your scan. They may take more images, if needed.

After your bone scan

You can drive yourself home after your procedure unless you took medicine for claustrophobia.

Most of the radioactive material will be out of your body within 24 hours after your scan. You do not need to limit contact with people. If you aren't breastfeeding, you do not need to follow any special instructions after your bone scan. You can go back to your usual activities.

Your healthcare provider's office will contact you with your results 2 to 3 business days after your scan.

If you had a bone scan with a sodium fluoride (NaF) injection

It is safe to be around people who are older than 18 and people who are pregnant. You can spend time near others, kiss, hug, hold, and touch them.

If you had a bone scan with a methylene diphosphonate (MDP) injection

It is safe to be around people who are older than 18 and people who are not pregnant. You can spend time near others, kiss, hug, hold, and touch them.

For 1 hour after your scan:

- Do not hold (have skin-to-skin contact with) a pregnant person or anyone younger than 18 years old.
- Do not sleep in the same bed with a pregnant person or anyone younger than 18 years old.

Instructions for people who are breastfeeding

Depending on the type of radioisotope used during your scan, you may need to stop breastfeeding for up to 24 hours. Your Nuclear Medicine healthcare provider will talk with you about what to do. If you have any questions, talk with your Nuclear Medicine healthcare provider.

If you had a bone scan with an NaF injection

If you had an NaF injection, stop breastfeeding for 4 hours after your scan.

During that time, you can feed the baby with formula, or with milk you expressed (pumped) before the scan. You can still pump milk. You can throw it away. Or, you can store the pumped milk for the same amount of time you paused breastfeeding (4 hours). Then give it to the baby.

If you had a bone scan with an MDP injection

If you had an MDP injection, stop breastfeeding for 24 hours after your scan.

During that time, you can feed the baby with formula, or with milk you expressed (pumped) before the scan. You can still pump milk. You can throw it away. Or, you can store the pumped milk for the same amount of time you paused breastfeeding (24 hours). Then give it to the baby.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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