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## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# About Your Bone Scan

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

A bone scan can be done for many reasons. You may have a bone scan to check for signs of cancer, arthritis (joint swelling), or 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'll wait for about 3 hours before having the scan. Your bone scan will take about 5 hours total.

## Before your bone scan

- During your bone scan, you'll 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 doctor before your appointment. 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'll have around 3 hours between your radioisotope injection and your bone scan. You may want to plan something to do or bring a book to help pass the time.

## **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 an inpatient (staying in the hospital), a staff member will take you to the Molecular Imaging and Therapy Service (sometimes called Nuclear Medicine) for your bone scan.

## **Radioisotope injection**

For the first part of your bone scan, you'll get an injection of a substance called a radioisotope. The radioisotope helps make it easier for 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. If your healthcare provider prescribed pain medicine to help with pain or discomfort during your scan, tell the healthcare provider. They'll tell you when to take it. Then they'll inject the radioisotope into a vein in your arm.

The radioisotope has a small amount of a radioactive material. This material won't harm you. You won't need to limit your contact with other people. If you're breastfeeding, you'll need to stop for 4 to 24 hours (1 day) after your bone scan. For more information, read the section "Instructions for people who are breastfeeding."

## **Waiting period**

After the radioisotope injection, you'll 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**

For the second part of your 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 that will be either above or next to you during the scanning process.

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

Once it's time for your scan, 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'll stay in the scanning room while your healthcare provider reviews your complete body scan. More images may be taken, if needed.

## **After your bone scan**

You can drive yourself home after your procedure, except if you took medicine for claustrophobia.

Most of the radioactive material will be out of your body within 24 hours after your scan. You don't need to limit contact with people. If you aren't breastfeeding, you don't 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 (Monday through Friday) after your scan.

## **If you had a bone scan with an 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 an 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'll need to stop breastfeeding for either 4 or 24 hours. Your Nuclear Medicine healthcare provider will talk with you about what to do. During this time, you can pump your milk and throw it away.

After 4 or 24 hours, you can start breastfeeding again. If you have any questions, speak with your Nuclear Medicine healthcare provider.

## **If you had a bone scan with an NaF injection**

Stop breastfeeding for 4 hours after your scan.

For the time that breastfeeding is interrupted, a mother can still express (pump) milk. She can then either throw away the pumped milk or store it for the same amount of time that breastfeeding is paused before giving it to the baby. During this time, the mother can feed the baby with previously expressed milk or formula.

## **If you had a bone scan with an MDP injection**

Stop breastfeeding for 24 hours after your scan.

For the time that breastfeeding is interrupted, a mother can still express (pump) milk. She can then either throw away the pumped milk or store it for the same amount of time that breastfeeding is paused before giving it to the baby. During this time, the mother can feed the baby with previously expressed milk or formula.

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](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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