

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Periodic Bone Density Testing

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Please re-read the sentence immediately above this. Thanks.

Because that is exactly what I intend to do. I want you to understand some important facts about bone density testing.

In 2012 a medical study of 5000 women, 65 years old with mild lower bone mass (osteopenia) said it was OK to delay further bone density testing for 17 years.

It was picked up and of course publicized in print and on the Internet as important new information.

The key point is there are several reasons this may not apply to you.

Don't believe everything you read or hear (except in my column!) as it can apply to some women, but not apply in your particular situation.

Testing

Many of you know it is done by a special x-ray technique (DXA) of the hip and spine. It produces a number called a T score that your doctor uses to tell what your bone health is.

Individualize

Studies are fine and important and they help guide treatment. I, as an Orthopaedic Surgeon, have to use my best judgment and do what I think is best for my individual patient.

I would never tell one of my patients they didn't need another Bone Density Test for 17 years.

So, What To Do?

Some doctors recommend bone density tests for all women over 65. If you have certain "risk factors" the age is lower. I prefer to have all women over 50 tested. Never mind the risk factors. In certain special cases such as a woman taking steroids I might test even younger.

The bone density test is non invasive and not terribly expensive. You don't even need to undress to have it.

Treatment

If on your initial bone density test you have mild, low bone density I would recommend the following.

- At least 1200 mg of Calcium per day from food and a supplement. If you go over, it's OK!
- Take 2000 i.u. of Vitamin D from a supplement to add to what you get in your diet.
- Thirty minutes of weight bearing exercise (walking) 5 days a week. Riding an exercise bike doesn't count.
- Quit smoking
- One alcoholic drink per day (4 oz of wine, 12oz of beer, or 1 oz of liquor).
- Do a follow up bone density test in 2 years.

Osteoporosis

An osteoporosis value in your bone density test indicates a more severe level of bone loss and a greater risk of fractures. This requires your doctor to treat your particular condition with medications beyond the scope of this article.

If you have Osteoporosis (more severe bone loss) and you are only doing what I recommended it is not enough. That recommendation is for mild bone loss.

So, don't be an accident waiting to happen doing nothing. Or you will be seeing me in the ER with a broken wrist or worse.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

Wow! Your window to the Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal world opens at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library of information, Your Orthopaedic Connection and Argus archive of all previous articles.

You will be amazed at all the helpful information it contains.

All of the information pertains to everything I treat in the office and hospital.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush