



York and Scarborough  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Nuclear Medicine Bone Scan

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

## **Radiology Department**

The York Hospital  
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

Nuclear Medicine  
Tel: 01904 725936

Or

Scarborough Hospital  
Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL

Nuclear Medicine  
Tel: 01723 342073

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## **About this leaflet**

In this leaflet, we tell you about the procedure known as a Nuclear Medicine bone scan. We explain what is involved and what the possible risks are. The information in this leaflet is not meant to replace informed discussion between you and your doctor, but can act as a starting point for such a discussion.

## **What is a bone scan?**

This is a Nuclear Medicine diagnostic imaging test that uses a radioactive tracer to take images of your bones.

## **Are there any alternatives?**

There may be alternative imaging studies available. However, your doctor has decided this test is the most appropriate for you, and it gives different information to other types of scan. If you have any concerns, please discuss them with the doctor who referred you to us.

## **What preparation is needed before the bone scan?**

There is no special preparation for the scan so you can eat and drink normally. You can bring a relative or friend with you but they will have to wait in the waiting room while you have your scan. Please do not bring children or pregnant adults with you to your appointment.

You will not be asked to remove your clothes for the scan, but it is a good idea to wear clothing that does not have a lot of metal on it. Small buttons and zips are fine.

# **What happens during the bone scan?**

At your first appointment, you will receive a small injection into a vein in your arm. The injection is a small amount of a radioactive tracer, which is absorbed by your bones and should have no adverse effect. After the injection you are free to leave the department and eat and drink as normal.

Your second appointment will be three hours after the injection and when you arrive back at the department you will be asked to empty your bladder. This is to get rid of any radioactive tracer that may have passed into your urine.

At your second appointment pictures of your bones will be taken using a machine called a “gamma camera”. You will not be asked to remove your clothes for the scan, but you will be required to remove metal items such as belts, keys and coins. Buttons and zips are fine.

You will be asked to lie flat on your back on a bed while the gamma camera takes the pictures. The scan starts with the gamma camera very close to your head. After about five minutes, you start to move out of the scanner. The whole scan will usually take about 25 minutes.

## **Why do I have to wait three hours?**

The radioactive tracer is injected into your bloodstream and over a period of time, your bones take the tracer out of your blood and absorb it. It is important that we have the maximum amount of radioactive tracer in your bones and very little left circulating in your blood. Evidence shows that the best images are obtained after waiting three hours.

## **What happens after the bone scan?**

After the scan you will be free to leave the Nuclear Medicine department. Sometimes plain x-rays may have also been requested by your doctor. These will be taken after the bone scan.

We recommend that you drink plenty of fluids for the rest of the day to help flush any remaining radioactive tracer out of your system.

## **Are there any risks or complications?**

Nuclear Medicine procedures are among very safe diagnostic imaging tests. Side effects from the radioactive tracers are extremely rare.

The amount of radioactivity involved is small, and after 24 hours most of the radioactive tracer will have passed out of your body.

There is radiation in the air and ground all around us called background radiation. Most radioisotope scans give you on average the equivalent of a year's background radiation or less.

This scan is not recommended for pregnant women. If you are pregnant, or might be pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding, please let us know before your appointment.

Further guidance has been published by Public Health England, visit website <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ionising-radiation-from-medical-imaging-examinations-safety-advice>

## **Results**

You will not be given the results on the day of your scan. A report will be sent to the doctor who asked us to do the test. They will then let you know the results.

## **What if I have any other questions?**

If you have any worries or questions about your scan, please feel free to telephone us on 01904 726696 for York scans or 01723 342073 for Scarborough and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Nuclear Medicine, Radiology, The York Hospital,  
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

## **Teaching, Training and Research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

# Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

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