

Bone X-rays

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how bone X-rays work, how to prepare, what to expect, and how to get your results.

What is a bone X-ray?

An X-ray (radiology exam) is a medical test that produces images (pictures) of a part of a body. These images help doctors diagnose health conditions.

Doctors use bone X-rays to view and assess broken bones, skull fractures, and spine injuries. Bone X-rays may also be used to:

- Guide *orthopedic* surgery (surgeries that involve bones, joints, ligaments, or muscles)
- Treat sports-related injuries
- Diagnose advanced forms of bone cancer

How does the exam work?

An X-ray machine is like a camera. But, it uses X-rays instead of light to create images. When the machine is turned on, X-rays pass through the part of the body that is being studied. Your doctor will view the X-ray images on a computer screen.

For a bone X-ray, at least 2 images are taken from different angles. If the problem is at a joint, 3 or more images may be needed.

How do I prepare?

- You do not need to prepare in any special way for most bone X-rays.
- We may ask you to change into a hospital gown before your exam.
- We will also ask you to remove jewelry, glasses, and any metal objects that could show up on the pictures.



X-ray images can be viewed on a computer screen.

- *Women:* Tell your doctor or X-ray technologist if there is any chance that you may be pregnant.

How is the exam done?

- The X-ray technologist will help you lie on the exam table. Sandbags or cushions may help you hold the best position for getting clear images.
- The technologist will ask you to hold very still for a few seconds and will then leave the room.
- You will hear the X-ray machine turn on and off. While it is on, it will send a beam of X-rays through your body to create an image.
- The technologist will come back into the room, help reposition you for another view, and repeat the process.
- When your X-rays are done, the technologist will ask you to wait until they check to make sure they have clear images of the area.

What will I feel during the exam?

- X-ray exams should not cause pain. You may feel some discomfort from lying on the cold, hard exam table.
- Sometimes, to avoid blurring the image, you may need to hold an uncomfortable position for a short time.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A *radiologist* is a doctor who is skilled in bone X-ray and other types of radiology exams. The radiologist will review your results and send a report to your primary care or referring provider. The radiologist will not talk with you about your X-ray images.

Your own provider will give you the results of your exam. You may also read your results on your eCare Results page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call 206.598.6206.

You and your provider will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- UWMC Imaging Services:
206.598.6200
- HMC Imaging Services:
206.744.3105