



Osteoporosis

Screening Guide for Patients

How to Use This Guide

This guide will help you prepare for a osteoporosis screening and ask for accommodations.

To best identify the accommodations you need, please use this guide together with **Health Care Accommodations: My Checklist**.

The Osteoporosis Screening Guide focuses only on accommodations needed for osteoporosis screening. **Health Care Accommodations: My Checklist** has other accommodations considerations like interpreters, accessible tables, or communication support.



Note: This guide uses the word *doctor*, but you may see a different type of health care professional, like a nurse practitioner or physician assistant. The information in this guide also applies to them.



Health Care Accommodations: My Checklist
Visit bit.ly/3HatJoy
Scan QR code at left

Getting Started

Best time to start:

One to two weeks before your appointment.

You can complete this guide:

On your own or with a trusted support person.

How to fill it out:

- Print it out and write in your answers
- Fill it out electronically and save or print it out



Instructions

1. Complete **Health Care Accommodations: My Checklist**.
2. **Read** about different ways to get screened for osteoporosis.
3. **Select** any accommodations you need.
4. **Write questions** you have for your doctor, insurance company, and local resources for this screening.
5. **Finalize** your osteoporosis screening plan.

Tips for Success

- **Take breaks.** Complete this guide one section at a time.
- **Focus on what matters most.** You do not have to answer every question.
- **Ask for help** if you need it.
- **Bring your completed Health Care Accommodations Checklist and this guide** to your appointment and share with your health care team.

What to Expect



What is Osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disorder that makes your bones weak and easy to break. It is important to screen, or test, for osteoporosis to find weak bones before they may break. When bones break or fracture due to osteoporosis, it can lead to health problems, trouble doing daily activities, and death.

Who Needs This Screening?

- Women and people assigned female at birth (people who were born with female body parts) who are 65 years or older.
- Others at risk include people who are:
 - Younger than 65 years old **and** are postmenopausal (period naturally stopped due to aging) **and** have at least one other risk factor
 - Menstruating (those still having periods) **and** have certain medical conditions (including disabilities) **or** medication-specific risk factors

Disability- and Medication Specific Risk Factors

Having a higher chance of osteoporosis depends on health, family history, and other factors. However, people with certain disabilities or who take certain medications have additional risk factors and may need to be screened for osteoporosis at a younger age than standard guidelines suggest. If you are not sure, talk to your doctor.

→ If You Have Certain Disabilities:

- Cerebral palsy (especially if you do not walk)
- Intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD)
- Spina bifida
- Down syndrome
- Muscular dystrophy
- Spinal cord injury
- Multiple sclerosis

→ If You Take Certain Medications:

- **Depo-Provera** (birth control shot) lowers estrogen (a hormone that keeps bones strong), causing bone loss even at a young age
- **Anti-seizure medications** (e.g., phenytoin, carbamazepine, and valproic acid) weaken bones by affecting vitamin D
- **Long-term steroids** (e.g., prednisone, cortisone) can make bones weaker
- **Antipsychotic medications** (e.g., risperidone, quetiapine, olanzapine, haloperidol, and others) interrupt your body's signals to repair bone

→ Other High-risk Factors:

- Poor nutrition or difficulty eating
- Limited sun exposure (vitamin D deficiency)
- History of fractures from minor falls
- Hormonal conditions (early menopause, low testosterone)

Important Note About Insurance Coverage:

Most insurance plans, including Medicare, **do not** cover bone density screening for people under age 65. This is true even if you have a disability that puts you at a higher risk for osteoporosis. Your doctor may need to write a letter to your insurance company explaining why the screening is **medically necessary**.

Some insurance plans may still say no. Ask your health care professional about other options if insurance will not cover the screening.

Your Screening Options

Important Note for People with Disabilities:

The recommendations that doctors follow do NOT consider risk factors for people with disabilities. You may need to advocate for yourself and share:

- Your specific disability and its bone health risks
- Medications that affect bone health (Depo-Provera, anti-seizure drugs, etc.)
- Limited mobility or fall history
- Nutrition or vitamin D deficiency

Remember, screenings are for health conditions that you may not have any signs or symptoms of but may be at risk for.

Standard Option: Bone Density Scan (DEXA/DXA Scan)

Who is this option for?

- Women and people assigned female at birth (people who were born with female body parts) ages 65 years or older
- People with disabilities at any age who have risk factors (see list above)
- People younger than 65 whose periods have naturally stopped

What happens during the screening?

1. Remove anything metal, like zippers, jewelry, underwire bras, etc.
2. Lie on your back on the table and remain still.
3. The health care professional may change the positions of your legs for the images.
4. A low-dose X-ray machine scans your **hip bones** and **spine** to check how strong your bones are.
5. The scan **takes about 10–30 minutes**.



Bone density scan

If standard positioning is difficult for you, ask about:

- **Lateral distal femur scanning**
 - Scans the side of the thigh bone
- **Peripheral DEXA**
 - Scans the wrist or the heel, which can be done sitting up
 - **Modified positioning** can work with supports and assistance

Alternate Option: Ultrasound Bone Density Scan

Who is this option for?

- Women and people assigned female at birth (people who were born with female body parts) ages 65 and older
- People for whom standard DEXA scan equipment is inaccessible
- People who cannot lie flat or hold still for extended periods
- People for whom X-rays may not be appropriate
- Excellent option for people with certain physical disabilities



Ultrasound

What happens during the screening?

1. You sit in a chair or lie on a table.
2. A small device is placed on your ankle or heel.
3. Ultrasound waves (sound waves with no radiation) check your bone density through the ankle/heel bone.
4. The scan takes only **two to five minutes**.
5. This can be done anywhere with a stable surface: in doctor's offices, community centers, or Special Olympics Healthy Athlete events.

Benefits:

Portable, quick, no radiation, easier positioning, and more accessible than standard DEXA scans

Risk Assessment for People Under Age 65

Who is this option for?

- Women and people assigned female at birth (people who were born with female body parts) younger than 65 years old who need to see if they should get a bone density scan.
- People who cannot easily access scanning equipment.

What happens during the assessment?

Your doctor will ask you questions about risk factors (reasons someone might be more likely to get osteoporosis).

Then your doctor will use a computer or similar tool to look at your risk factors and calculate your fracture risk.

Depending on your results, you may need a bone density scan.

You may be asked about:

- Low body weight
- Family history of hip fracture (parent who broke their hip)
- Smoking history
- How much alcohol you drink
- Certain medications
- Poor nutrition or difficulty eating

Accommodations You Can Ask For

Doctors must help and support your needs within reason. This is called **reasonable accommodations**. A doctor may not be able to provide every accommodation you ask for.

If they cannot accommodate you, then they should talk with you about other options for getting the care you need.



Accommodations for Osteoporosis Screening

Instructions:

Check the box next to each accommodation you may need. Bring this checklist to your appointment.

Getting Ready for the Screening:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff assistance removing metal items (jewelry, bras with metal wires)
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Getting Into Position for the Screening:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Alternative scanning sites (wrist, heel, side of thigh)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Modified positioning

During the Screening:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Tell me exactly how long I need to keep still
<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff assistance keeping still during the scan
<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff explains each step as the screening is happening so I know what to expect

Other Accommodations I Need:

<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

Questions to Ask



Questions for My Doctor's Office:

Ask the receptionist these questions when you call to schedule your appointment or call any time before your visit.

“I have a list of accommodations that would support me during my osteoporosis screening. Can you review this list and tell me which ones your office can provide?”

Other questions for my doctor's office:

Questions to Ask



Questions for My Doctor:

“Based on my disability and risk factors, do I need osteoporosis screening even though I’m under 65 and premenopausal (haven’t stopped having periods yet)?”

- Yes, I need osteoporosis screening now
- No, I do not need osteoporosis screening yet
- I need a risk assessment first

“What medications am I taking that might affect my bone health?”

“What other screening options are there if a standard DEXA scan is inaccessible to me?”

- Ultrasound scan
- Peripheral DEXA (wrist/heel)

“How often do I need to get osteoporosis screening given my disability and risk factors?”

“What can I do to protect my bone health?”

Safe, accessible exercises:

Supplements or vitamins needed:

Strategies to prevent falls:

Additional supports (e.g., diet):

Other questions for my doctor:



Questions to Ask Insurance:

Call the number on your insurance card or visit your insurance online portal (if available).

“What osteoporosis screening options does my insurance cover for people with disabilities under age 65?”

- DEXA/DXA bone density scan
- Ultrasound bone density scan
- Risk assessment visits
- Other: _____

“Will my insurance cover screenings earlier than standard guidelines if my doctor says it is medically necessary because of my disability?”

- Yes No Need pre-authorization

Other questions for insurance:



Questions to Ask About Local Resources

To find accessible screening locations, contact your local health department, disability organizations (call 211), search www.findhelp.org, or ask your doctor's office.

“Which health care facilities near me have accessible bone density equipment?”

“Are there mobile bone density screening programs that come to disability centers, group homes, or day programs?”

“Do the Special Olympics or other disability organizations in my area offer bone density screening?”

Other questions about local resources:

My Plan for Osteoporosis Screening

Type of screening I will get:

- Standard DEXA scan
- Peripheral DEXA (wrist/heel)
- Ultrasound bone density scan
- Risk assessment (evaluation of my risk factors)
- Other: _____

Why I need this screening:

- I am over 65 years of age
- My disability increases my risk for osteoporosis
- I use medications that affect bone health
- I have had fractures from minor falls
- Other: _____

My Appointment



Date of my appointment:

Time of my appointment:



Location of my appointment:

Address:

My Appointment

Directions to the office:

Accessible parking or drop-off location:

Accessible entrance and elevator location:

Self-Advocacy Tips

- **Bring information** that shows people with your disability have higher risk for weak bones.
- **Ask your doctor specifically** about birth control shots, seizure medicines, or other things that might weaken your bones.
- **Ask your doctor to write a letter** explaining why you need the screening if your insurance says no.
- **Get a second opinion** if your doctor does not address your concerns about getting screened early.

Screening for All



Making preventive health screenings accessible for everyone.

More resources available at
mcd.org/screening-for-all



Screening For All is an initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD) to address the significant barriers people with disabilities face in accessing preventive health screenings.

Developed by MCD Global Health, this project provides patients and health care practitioners with evidence-based tools and resources to make preventive health screenings accessible to all patients. Questions or comments can be sent to info@mcd.org.

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