

Do I need a DEXA scan?

Your doctor will discuss this with you. The risk of fragility fractures in people aged over 65 on steroids is high enough for us to recommend bone protection, without the need for a DEXA scan.

Most patients aged under 65 who take steroids for more than three months should have a DEXA scan. If steroids are continued long-term, you should undergo a DEXA scan about every three years.

Is there anything else to consider?

There may be other factors affecting the health of your bones, such as your age, gender, level of kidney function, and any other medical conditions. There are also certain situations in which bisphosphonates should not be used. Your doctor will discuss the issues relevant to you.

What else I can do?

There are several measures you can take to keep your bones strong:

- Avoid smoking
- Limit alcohol intake
- Take regular weight-bearing exercise
- Eat a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D

Where can I get further information?

Please discuss bone health with your specialist, nurse, or GP.

The National Osteoporosis Society has lots of information and advice on its website: www.nos.org.uk

Do not stop or reduce your steroid treatment without first discussing with your doctor.

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Steroids and your bones

What you need to know about steroid-induced osteoporosis

If you would like this information in an alternative format, please ask a member of staff.

Steroids are a very effective treatment for many inflammatory conditions.

Prescribed by specialists, their effects are closely monitored.

Your doctor may prescribe long-term steroids to control your condition.

Like all medications, steroids have some side effects, which you should be aware of. Some patients on long-term steroids can develop **osteoporosis**.

This leaflet provides information on how we identify and treat patients at risk of this condition.

What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis refers to reduced bone density and strength. Weaker bones can break (fracture) more easily. A fracture caused by a minor bump or fall is called a *fragility fracture*.

Steroid-induced osteoporosis can affect up to 50% of people taking long-term steroids, unless steps are taken to prevent it.

Can it be prevented or treated?

Yes. Patients at high risk of osteoporosis are offered “bone protection” medications called *bisphosphonates*. These increase bone density and strength, with the aim of preventing fractures. Calcium and vitamin D supplements are often prescribed at the same time.

Do I need bone protection?

Not everyone on long-term steroids needs bone protection. In general, you should take bone protection if:

- You are aged over 65
- You have had a fragility fracture (regardless of age)
- Your bone density is low.

How is bone density measured?

A Dual-Energy X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) scan uses special x-ray beams to measure the density of the bones in your hip and spine.

A DEXA may be required to assess the density of your bones and your risk of a fragility fracture.

It is a painless scan, which takes around 20 minutes to perform.

Your doctor will discuss the results of your DEXA scan with you.