

Diagnosing Bone Cancer - A Quick Guide



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This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing bone cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Tests for bone cancer
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- What to ask your doctor about tests for bone cancer

Tests for bone cancer

Your GP or specialist will examine you and ask about your symptoms, medical history and general health. You may then need to have more tests.

X-rays and scans

You will probably have an X-ray. You may also have a bone scan or an MRI scan. For an MRI scan you lie very still inside a large machine. The scan is painless but rather noisy. Some people can't have an MRI, for example, if you have a pacemaker.

Biopsy

The only way to tell whether a lump is a cancer is to get a small sample (a biopsy) and look at it under a microscope. A bone biopsy is a highly specialised procedure.

Ask for the biopsy to be done at the specialist centre where you will be treated if the cancer is confirmed. The specialist will usually take the biopsy with a needle, under local or general anaesthetic.

After the tests

Bone biopsies take longer to process than most other biopsies. You are bound to feel anxious during this time. It may help to talk to a relative or friend about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience.

Further tests for bone cancer

If tests show that you have bone cancer, you will need more tests to see how big the cancer is and whether it has spread. This is called staging. It is important because the stage of the cancer affects the choice of treatment.

Bone scan, Chest X-ray and CT scan

Bone scans are very sensitive and can show if there is something wrong with the bones and how much of the bone is affected. If you have not already had a chest X-ray, you may have one to check whether the cancer has spread to the lungs. Most people also have a CT scan of their chest.



Blood tests

You may have blood tests to check your general health.

Other tests

If you are diagnosed with bone cancer you may have other tests. For example, your doctor may measure your heart function and your hearing. This is because some of the chemotherapy drugs for bone cancer can affect your heart or hearing. This is not common, but your doctor may want to take baseline measurements. If you have any problems later, they will then have something to compare to.

After the tests

You are bound to feel anxious while waiting for your test results. It might help to talk to a relative or friend about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience.

What to ask your doctor about tests for bone cancer

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- Do I need a biopsy?
- If so, will I have it at a specialist centre?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Will the tests show whether my cancer can be operated on?
- If so, where will I have the operation?
- Where is the best centre for this type of treatment?
- Are any of the tests painful?

- Do any of the tests have after effects?
- Can I have these tests as an outpatient?
- Should I bring someone with me when I have the tests?
- How long will the results take?
- Who will give me the test results?
- How will you give me the results - by letter, phone or in person?
- Is there a support group in the area or an information centre in this hospital?

More information

For more information about bone cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040**
9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in November 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2010. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).