Your Child's DEXA Scan

This handout explains what a DEXA scan is. It also explains why we use it in the Pediatric Fitness Clinic and how it can help our patients.

DEXA Scan
DEXA stands for "Dual-Energy X-ray Absorptiometry". We use a low-radiation X-ray to determine someone's body composition. This shows much more information than weight or Body Mass Index (BMI).

During the DEXA scan, patients hold still on a padded table for about 4 to 5 minutes. That is it! You will receive interpretation and results shortly after the scan.

What a DEXA Scan Shows
A DEXA scan measures what your body is made of. You get to see your total bone, muscle, and fat in the body. As kids grow, we see changes in these tissues that cannot be measured on the scale.

By discussing body composition, we take the focus off body weight and BMI. We emphasize the positive changes that happen to us on the inside with healthy lifestyle choices.

DEXA Scan Safety
The DEXA scan is very safe. It is 1,000 times less powerful than a typical X-ray device. During one scan, you receive less radiation than sitting in the sun during one baseball game.

DEXA Scan Frequency
We usually perform a DEXA scan every 6 months. Our clinic data shows that it often takes about 6 months to see clear changes in body composition.

Understanding the Results
Our goal is to track **your** changes over time. Since there is no standardized data for pediatrics, we **do not** compare your results with anyone else.

The DEXA scan connects what we talk about in clinic to what happens inside the body. Staying physically active and focusing on nutrition helps you grow!

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8555.