

VFA. Patient Information.

What is VFA?

Vertebral fracture analysis is a view of the spine that checks for previous fractures of the vertebrae (the bones of the spine). It can be done at the same time that you have your Osteoscan.

Is VFA different from an X-ray of the spine?

It is not as detailed as an X-ray, but uses about 1000 times less radiation.

Surely I would remember having had a fracture of the spine?

In fact, two thirds of the people with a vertebral fracture in the spine don't remember it happening; or they remember being in pain, but had called it a "strain."

Why does looking for old fractures matter?

Our job is to tell your doctor whether a fragility fracture is likely, or unlikely, to occur in the next few years. If you already have one fragility fracture, you have a higher risk of another fracture. If we find a previous fracture of the spine, it increases the risk estimate that we send to your doctor.

Who is more likely to have an old fracture of the spine?

VFA in patients older than 60 shows old fractures in every fourth patient. Two thirds of these patients don't remember having had a fracture.

What difference does it make, if I decline to have a VFA?

If you are over 60, there is a 1 in 6 chance that we will risk estimate to your doctor that is too low. In patients over 70, our risk estimate is too low in every fourth patient. The same error applies to patients who already have osteoporosis.

If I decide to go ahead with the VFA, why do I have to pay for it?

Medicare does not offer any payment for VFA. It is difficult to say why not, when VFA is so obviously important.

Why doesn't every patient have a VFA?

Younger patients only need a VFA if they have already got osteoporosis. Also, some doctors don't order VFA tests. And some patients with very good bone density just don't need VFA.