



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Bone marrow culture

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Bone marrow culture

Bone marrow culture is an examination of the soft, fatty tissue found inside certain bones. The bone marrow tissue produces blood cells. This test is done to look for an infection inside the bone marrow. It is often done to diagnose prolonged fever that remains unexplained after other tests.

How the Test is Performed

The doctor removes a sample of your bone marrow from the back of your pelvic bone or front of your breast bone. This is done with a small needle inserted into your bone. The procedure is called a bone marrow aspiration or a biopsy.

The tissue sample is sent to a lab. It is placed into a special container called a culture dish. The tissue sample is examined under a microscope each day to see if any bacteria, fungi, or viruses have grown.

If any bacteria, fungi, or viruses are found, other tests may be done to learn which drugs will kill the organisms. Treatment can then be adjusted based on these results.

How to Prepare for the Test

Follow any specific instructions from your health care provider on how to prepare for the test.

Tell the provider:

- If you are allergic to any medicines
- What medicines you are taking
- If you have bleeding problems
- If you are pregnant

How the Test will Feel

You will feel a sharp sting when numbing medicine is injected. The biopsy needle may also cause a brief, usually dull, pain. Since the inside of the bone cannot be numbed, this test may cause some discomfort.

If a bone marrow aspiration is also done, you may feel a brief, sharp pain as the bone marrow liquid is removed.

Soreness at the site usually lasts from a few hours up to 2 days.

Why the Test is Performed

You may have this test if you have a prolonged unexplained fever or if your provider thinks you have an infection of the bone marrow.

Normal Results

No growth of bacteria, viruses, or fungi in the culture is normal.

What Abnormal Results Mean

Abnormal results suggest that you have an infection of the bone marrow. The infection may be from bacteria, viruses, or fungi.

Risks

There may be some bleeding at the puncture site. More serious risks, such as serious bleeding or infection, are very rare.

Alternative Names

Culture - bone marrow

References

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Updated by: Mark Levin, MD, Hematologist and Oncologist, Monsey, NY. Review provided by VeriMed Healthcare Network. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

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