Skeletal survey

A skeletal survey is a complete set of x-rays used to check a person’s bones. It consists of about 21 x-rays and includes the skull, spine, ribs, chest, pelvis, arms, legs, hands, and feet.

What happens during a skeletal survey?

Your child will lie on a narrow table under the x-ray machine. The technologist will use sponges and towels to help your child hold each body part still. If they move, the x-rays are blurry and may need to be taken again. The technologist may need to hold your child still if they move too much.

The technologist will start with x-rays of the feet, and then move to the legs, pelvis, chest, skull, hands, arms, and finally the spine. They will take the x-rays as quickly as possible. There are usually two radiology technologists to help. One works at a computer. The other will position and comfort your child during the x-rays.

Your child may cry during the exam if the technologist is holding them still. They may have also have red skin from being held. This is a normal reaction, and the redness should go away quickly.

How can I help my child prepare for a skeletal survey?

• Tell your child they need to lie still during the skeletal survey and not move.
• Talk about how the x-ray machine works. It will take pictures of your child’s body, but it will not hurt.
• Explain that you will wait outside the room during the skeletal survey. If you are in the room, you may distract your child and it might make the x-rays blurry.

What happens after the skeletal survey?

Once the technologist takes all the x-rays, a radiologist (x-ray doctor) will look at them. If your child does not need any other x-rays, your child will return to you and the exam is finished. The radiologist looks at the x-rays very carefully and sends a report about them to your child’s healthcare provider. They will call you about the results.

What if I have more questions?

If you have any other questions, ask your child’s healthcare provider or the radiology technologist.