X-rays, What They Are

An x-ray is a test where an invisible beam of electromagnetic radiation is focused through a part of the body. The beam exposes a specialized film behind the patient. This film is then developed and shows the body part in shadow-like images for your caregiver to examine. Tissues of the body which are denser, such as bone, will appear as white on an x-ray. Tissues which are less dense, such as the lungs, will appear almost black. The rays go through the less dense tissues easier and expose the film to a darker picture. An example of this would be that cotton is less dense than a wood board, so the board would show up better on an x-ray.

Sometimes x-rays are taken with the help of a fluoroscopic screen. This is like watching a black and white television show of what is being examined. This can be used to produce a video of an entire procedure. Also, single pictures may be kept from the video and used to produce a permanent image (x-ray).

The techniques mentioned above all produce shadow images. Often, contrast materials may be used because some body structures do not show up well enough on an x-ray. These materials, such as barium, may be swallowed to cause the stomach and intestines to show up better when they are x-rayed. Another example of this is a clear liquid dye that is injected into a blood vessel to outline the vessel, or outline an organ which is supplied by a blood vessel carrying the dye.

X-ray studies are done as a part of various forms of medical evaluation. They have been examined by your doctor. They will also be checked by a radiology specialist and a report will be sent to your doctor. You will be called if a review of your x-rays shows that further examinations or treatments are needed. Please call your doctor or the x-ray department if you have any questions about your x-ray results, or want to have your x-rays sent to a doctor's office.

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