

Mammogram What Every Woman Should Know

Most often, two pictures are taken of each breast – one from the side and one from above. A screening mammogram takes about 20 minutes from start to finish. Sometimes, a breast ultrasound will be performed as well to assist the radiologist in evaluating a particular area.

After the mammogram

A radiologist will look at your mammogram and see if there are any abnormal findings. If yes, you will be called back for more investigations. Some cancers do not show clear signs on the mammogram and further test need to be done. So, if you find any suspicious lump or changes in your breast always tell your doctor, even if you have recently had a mammogram.

Remember:

You should still make sure you know how your breasts normally look, even if you have any variation. Most breast cancers are noticed by women who check themselves. If you notice any changes in your breast, do not wait until your next mammogram; see your primary healthcare doctor straight away.

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Q: What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is a low-dose x-ray exam of the breasts to look for changes that are not normal. The results are recorded on x-ray film or directly into a computer for a doctor, called a radiologist, to examine.

Mammograms are used as part of a screening plan to check for breast cancer in women who have no signs or symptoms of the disease. Mammograms are generally considered safe, quick and relatively painless.

Q: What are the benefits and risks of a mammogram?

Benefits:

- Screening mammography increases the detection of small abnormal tissue. When cancers are small, the woman has more treatment options and a cure is more likely.

Risks:

- False negative mammograms, there is about a 10% chance that an existing breast cancer may not be found.
- There is always a slight chance of cancer from repetitive exposure to radiation, which is why excessive mammograms are not

recommended, even though the dose is low. However, the benefit of an accurate diagnosis far outweighs the risk.

- X-rays could harm an unborn baby; therefore it is important that you inform the staff if there is any possibility that you are pregnant.

Q: How do I get ready for my mammogram?

A: First, check with the mammogram team for any special instructions you may need to follow before you go. Here are some general guidelines to follow:

- If you are still having menstrual periods, try to avoid making your mammogram appointment during the week before your period. Your breasts will be tender and swollen. It is better to have the appointment within the first ten days from the start of your period, so the mammogram will hurt less and the picture will be better. However, if you are menopausal you can make an appointment on any day of the month.
- If you have breast implants, be sure to tell your mammography facility that you have them when you make your appointment.
- Wear something comfortable that is easy to take off as you will need to undress from the waist up – a gown will be given to you by staff.
- Don't wear any deodorant, perfume, lotion, or powder under your arms or on your breasts on the day of your mammogram appointment. These things can make shadows that show up on your mammogram.
- If you have had mammograms at another facility, bring those x-ray films with you so the doctor can compare them to the new films or results.

Q: How is a mammogram done?

A: You will need to undress above the waist and put on a suitable gown which will be given to you by staff.

You stand in front of a special x-ray machine. The Radiologist (the person who takes the x-rays), places your breasts, one at a time, between an x-ray plate and a plastic plate. These plates are attached to the x-ray machine and compress the breasts to flatten them. This spreads the breast tissue out to obtain a clearer picture.

You will feel pressure on your breast for a few seconds. It may cause you some discomfort; you might feel squeezed or pinched. This feeling only lasts for a few seconds, and the flatter your breast, the better the picture.