

Mammogram

Mammogram.

A mammogram is an x-ray of your breasts. It provides a picture of the inside of your breasts where breast cancer starts. Mammograms may be done in a hospital or clinic with a portable mammogram machine, or even at a shopping center. No medicine or anesthesia is needed.

There are two types of mammograms, screening and diagnostic.

Screening Mammogram.

A screening mammogram is done for women who have had no symptoms, meaning they have no lump in their breast or other sign of breast cancer. The goal of a screening mammogram is to find tiny breast cancers that you can't even feel yet when they're most successfully treated.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that you get screened for breast cancer every other year, starting at age 40, and keep getting screened until age 74. But you and your doctor can decide what's right for you.

Factors like your family's health history may raise your risk for the disease

For a screening mammogram, you'll be shown to a private area, and you'll remove your clothes from the waist up. A soft cape will be provided for you to wear. Next, you'll go to a room where you'll meet a technician who will take your mammogram.

The technician will help you place one breast on a plastic x-ray shelf, which you sit or stand up against. She may ask you to hold onto a handle or turn your body slightly so your breast is positioned just right.

When you're in position, a second plate will slowly come down and squeeze your breast for a few seconds while the x-ray is taken. You'll feel pressure but only for a second or two, and you'll be asked to hold your breath during this time.

Usually, two x-rays are taken of each breast. It takes about 15 minutes, and then you can leave. You'll get your results from your healthcare provider at a later date.

Diagnostic Mammogram.

A diagnostic mammogram may be required if you feel a lump in your breast, have other symptoms such as pain, or if your screening mammogram shows something that requires a closer look.

A diagnostic mammogram is just like a screening mammogram except it can take longer because more x-rays of the breast are taken, especially in the area surrounding the lump or other abnormality.

For this test, a technician may place sticky dots on your breast; for example, where a lump can be felt or where an odd spot has been seen on your screening mammogram,

These help show the location of any abnormalities on the x-rays.

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If your healthcare provider wants even more information after a diagnostic mammogram, you may have an ultrasound. This is the same painless procedure used to monitor a baby's progress during pregnancy.

For an ultrasound, you lie down, a warm gel is applied to your breast, and a device like a microphone is moved gently over your breast. Painless sound waves move through the breast and echo back to a monitor where pictures appear.

Ultrasound can show that a breast lump is only a harmless fluid-filled cyst or that more tests are needed.

You may need an ultrasound if you are pregnant or younger than age 30 and have breast symptoms such as pain, or have dense breast tissue. If still more information is required, you may need to have a breast biopsy.

During a biopsy, cells are removed so they can be looked at under a microscope to see if they're cancerous. A biopsy of the breast may be done in your healthcare provider's office or in a hospital.

Things to Remember.

Have your mammogram a week after your period ends when your breasts are less tender. Tell the mammogram technician if you have breast implants. Your mammogram might take a little longer if you have them.

Don't put on any lotion, perfume, or deodorant before your mammogram. Don't be too concerned if your healthcare provider tells you your screening mammogram shows something odd and recommends a diagnostic mammogram to check it out. Most women who have a follow-up diagnostic mammogram do not have breast cancer.

Don't worry about radiation from a mammogram. You will get a very low dose.

What We Have Learned.

Every woman needs a screening mammogram every other year starting at age 40. True or False? The answer is True.

A mammogram uses radiation. True or False? The answer is True. A mammogram is done with x-rays, which use a small amount of radiation.

The day of your mammogram, you can apply deodorant and body lotion as normal.

True or False? The answer is False. Body lotion, deodorant, powder, and oil can cause problems with getting clear x-ray images.

Make sure the skin of your breasts, chest, and underarms is clean and clear of these products on the day of your test.