

Mammogram

WHAT IS A MAMMOGRAM?

A mammogram is a safe, low-dose x-ray procedure that films the internal tissues of your breasts. Mammograms are a simple exam, performed as a standard diagnostic study, to determine the possibility of irregularities within the breast. They can reveal areas too small or deep to feel, which may or may not require further investigation.

DOES EVERY WOMAN NEED A MAMMOGRAM?

Yes. Presently we don't know the cause of breast cancer, but early detection is a woman's best protection. A mammogram may help discover a change as small as the head of a pin, years before it can be felt. Additionally, having mammograms done on a regular basis allows for comparisons of a baseline study with future mammograms. This provides a more accurate assessment of any breast changes. The sooner changes are detected, the easier and more successful the treatment.

WHEN SHOULD I HAVE MY MAMMOGRAM?

The American Cancer Society guidelines, based upon numerous scientific studies, suggest that most women should begin by age 40 and continue yearly for the rest of their lives. Your health care provider can help you determine when you should begin and how often you should have a mammogram based upon specific medical facts in your family history.

WHAT WILL THE EXAM BE LIKE?

The mammogram will be performed by a radiologic technologist specializing in mammography. The technologist has completed a rigorous course in education and training and works under close supervision of the radiologist to assure the most accurate results from your examination.

You will be asked to undress from the waist up. The technologist will position your breast and gently compress it upon the image plate (which contains the film). It is necessary to spread the breast tissue to reduce the thickness of the breast. This allows for lower doses of radiation and the clearest possible x-ray image. You will probably have at least two pictures taken in slightly different positions. The procedure will then be repeated for the other breast.

HOW LONG WILL THE ENTIRE EXAM TAKE?

Usually about 15 to 30 minutes.

HOW WILL I FIND OUT THE RESULTS?

It is important that you get your results. A radiologist specializing in reading mammograms will thoroughly evaluate your films. The results will be sent to your health care provider. Your mammography facility will inform you of the results.

A regular program of breast self-examination, mammography, and physical exams most effectively provides early detection and treatment. Roughly 96% of all breast cancer cases can be detected when all three methods are used together in a planned program.

Many normal breasts (for women under 50) tend to be lumpy and are not a sign of cancer. Every woman should become familiar with the look and feel of her own breasts so that she will be able to recognize any changes that might occur.

BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION

Step 1 - Look for Changes

Stand or sit (with arms at your side) in front of a mirror under good light and look for changes in the size, shape, texture, or color of your breasts. Check for indentations, pulled-in nipples, scaliness, rash or prolonged skin conditions.

Next, raise your arms above your head and repeat the same steps. Also, turn in profile, and examine your breast from the side.

Now, press your hands down upon your hips and tense your chest muscles. This will make any changes more prominent.

Step 2 - Feel for Changes

Begin by lying flat on your back with a pillow under your shoulder. Use the pads of three fingers in a bowed-out position. Move your fingers in circles about the size of a dime. You can use cream or powder to help your fingers glide from one spot to the next. Use light, medium and firm pressure at each spot to examine the full thickness of your breast tissue. Large-breasted women should do the above exam while lying on their side. If any changes are noted, call your health care specialist right away.

The method outlined above is a new approach researched by the American Cancer Society. It covers a larger area in a more detailed manner.

REMEMBER:

Tell your doctor or technologist if you are pregnant or think you may be, or if you've had breast surgery.

You should also:

● Wear comfortable clothing and avoid wearing jewelry, deodorants and powders -metallics may

interfere with the accuracy of the film image.

- For a more comfortable exam, schedule mammograms for the week after the onset of your period.
- Bring previous mammograms for comparison.

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