

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an x-ray examination of the breasts, used to detect and diagnose breast diseases. Screening mammography is used as a preventive measure for women who have no symptoms of breast disease.

A screening mammogram usually involves two views of each breast. Diagnostic mammography involves additional views of the breast, and is used when an abnormality is found during screening, or in women who have breast complaints, such as a breast mass, nipple discharge, breast pain, or skin irritation.

Mammography is a very safe procedure that uses low doses of radiation to produce high quality x-rays.

Are there different kinds of mammograms?

Two kinds of mammograms are available:

- Screen-film mammography
- Digital mammography

In screen-film mammography, the breast image is captured on x-ray film. The film is then developed, and a physician who specializes in the interpretation of x-rays and other types of diagnostic imaging studies, reviews the films on a high-intensity light box.

In digital mammography, the breast image is captured on specially designed digital detectors. The digital detector converts x-rays into an electrical signal, which is then sent to a computer. The radiologist can review the digital mammogram on a high-resolution computer monitor.

Who should have a mammogram?

The American Cancer Society recommends that all women have a baseline screening mammogram between the age of 35 and 40 and that beginning at the age of 40, women have an annual screening mammogram.

In addition to annual screening for women 40 and older, women with certain risk factors should discuss an appropriate screening program with their physician.

What are the risk factors for breast cancer?

Some of the known risk factors for breast cancer include:

- family or personal history of breast cancer
- early menstrual onset/late onset menopause
- use of oral contraceptives
- use of hormone replacement therapy
- alcohol use (2 or more drinks/day)

How should I prepare for a mammogram?

- If you have had mammograms in different facilities, call those facilities in advance and arrange to have your previous mammograms, reports and any other treatment reports forwarded.
- Do not wear deodorant, powder or cream under your arms as it may interfere with the quality of your mammogram.

How is mammography performed?

- You will need to undress above the waist and will be given a wrap to wear during the mammogram.
- You and a breast imaging technologist will be the only ones present during the mammogram. The technologist will position each breast, one at a time, on the mammography equipment. The breast will then be compressed, and the x-ray will be taken.
- If you are having a screen-film mammogram, the technologist will take all of the x-rays needed for the examination. She will then develop the films before you leave, to make sure each film shows the right view and exposure.
- If you are having a digital mammogram, each x-ray will appear on the technologist's computer screen, and she will be able to make sure each image shows the right view before positioning you for the next x-ray.
- The entire procedure should take about 20 minutes.

How will I get my results?

Your mammogram will be read by a radiologist. The radiologist will send a report to your physician and your physician will notify you of the results.

Is a mammogram painful?

Breast compression may cause some discomfort for a brief time during each x-ray, but it should not be painful.

Breast compression helps obtain better images by:

- Spreading out the breast so the maximum amount of tissue can be examined.
- Allowing a lower x-ray dose to be used, since the x-ray beams pass through a thinner amount of tissue
- Holding the breast in place to prevent blurring caused by motion.

If you have sensitive breasts, schedule your mammogram at a time of the month when your breasts will be less tender. In general, the week after a period is when breasts are less tender.



Early Detection is the Key

Although there has been a decline in the rate of deaths from breast cancer in recent years, it is still the second leading cause of cancer death in women, exceeded only by lung cancer. Studies have shown that, when detected early, the chance for successful treatment of breast cancer is nearly 100%.

Methods for early detection of breast cancer include clinical examinations by a healthcare professional and mammography. In most cases, mammography can identify an abnormal breast mass as much as two years before it can be detected by touch.

Some physicians also recommend a monthly breast self examination for all women beginning at the age of 20, following proper training by a qualified healthcare professional.

For additional information on breast health, call the American Cancer Society at 1.800.ACS.2345 or visit www.hologic.com.