

knowledge

Know the facts about mammograms



How safe are they?

Mammography has been used on millions of women for over 25 years. Like all X-rays, it involves limited exposure to radiation; but the amount required is small. Advances begun in 1987 in all areas of mammography have dramatically reduced the radiation dose.

I have breast implants. Can I still get a mammogram?

With specialized techniques, described by Dr. Eklund, most women with implants can have an excellent mammogram. Because of the additional views necessary in women with implants, these women should expect to have twice as many pictures taken of each breast. They should not be excluded from screening because of the implants. If you have implants, check with the technologists to be sure they are aware of the specialized techniques. Otherwise the exam may be inadequate. Also, advise the clinic that you have breast implants at the time of your booking, so extra time can be allowed for your examination.

How do I get a mammogram?

Ask your doctor today for assistance in making an appointment with an accredited mammography center.

For more detailed information, you can contact the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Cancer Information Service at 1-800-422-6237 for answers to questions or to assist you in locating an accredited mammography facility near you.

Hospital Name Here

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What is a mammogram?

Mammography is a simple X-ray of the breast that can detect cancers so small that even the most experienced examiner cannot feel them. The examination itself uses X-rays to view the breast, usually from two angles. To get the most accurate picture possible in each X-ray, a special device gently squeezes the breast. Although this may sound painful, it is only slightly uncomfortable and the length of time the breast is compressed is just a few seconds.

On the day of your exam, it is best to wear a two-piece outfit. It is also best not to wear lotions, powders or deodorant when you go for your mammogram, as these can interfere with mammographic image quality. And you will therefore be asked to remove them prior to your exam.

Who should get a mammogram?

Eventually, all women should get a mammogram. The American Cancer Society offers the following guidelines to women who are symptom-free:

- Women 20 and older should perform breast self-examinations every month.
- Women 20 to 39 should have a physical breast examination every three years, and women 40 and older should have one every year.
- Women 40 and older should have a mammogram every year, or more often for women at increased risk.

Women with personal or family histories of breast cancer should consult their doctors about the need for more frequent or earlier mammography.

Why should I get a mammogram?

Studies have shown that mammography saves lives. The purpose of mammogram screenings is to find issues before they are problems. Ignoring the risk of breast cancer does not diminish it. The difference in quality and quantity of life in women whose cancers are detected before they cause symptoms, and those that aren't, is reason enough to have a mammogram.

Mammography, combined with physical examination, could reduce the breast cancer mortality rate by over 20-30 percent. But it is important to discuss your treatment with your doctor, understand their recommendations completely, and then act on them.

When should I get a mammogram?

The facts are that the risk of breast cancer increases with age. So the older you get, the more chance you have of developing breast cancer. Unfortunately, the incidence of breast cancer is also increasing in younger women. That is why screening should begin at age 40, or earlier for women at increased risk.

The first mammogram serves as a baseline or as a "comparison." The purpose of regular mammograms is to make sure that everything stays the same and that nothing new develops. This is one of the ways to find those tiny cancers that are too small to be felt.

The American Cancer Society and numerous other medical groups have determined that women age 40 and older should have a yearly mammogram. Women who have a family history of breast cancer should have mammograms more often (most recommend yearly after age 35). Other risk factors include other types of cancer such as colon cancer and uterine cancer. Women with no children or who have their first child after age 30 are also at a higher risk for developing breast cancer.

How accurate is it?

Mammography has been used increasingly since 1960 and is constantly being improved. It is accurate about 90 percent of the time. And it's also why more and more doctors are using mammography to help diagnose breast cancer in its earliest, most treatable stages.