



## Mammogram

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### **What is a mammogram?**

A mammogram is a low-dose X-ray that examines breast tissue.

### **When is it used?**

A mammogram helps detect breast cancer at an early stage. Mammograms can detect some types of cancer before you or your healthcare provider can feel a lump. They detect most cancerous growths in the breasts.

Mammograms are also used to check lumps you or your healthcare provider have found in a physical exam. They can help determine which lumps are cancerous and which are benign. However, all suspicious lumps should be biopsied or removed, even when the lump appears noncancerous (benign) on a mammogram.

Mammograms can also show a more exact location of a growth before you have surgery or a biopsy to remove it.

### **How do I prepare for a mammogram?**

Be sure your underarms and chest are clean. Don't put any deodorants, powders, lotions, or perfumes on your underarms or chest on the day your mammogram is to be done. These products can make it difficult to interpret the test results correctly.

### **What happens during the procedure?**

A mammogram is done in your healthcare provider's office, an X-ray clinic, or a mobile van with a mammography machine inside. You will be asked to take off your shirt, bra, and jewelry. It takes just a few minutes for the technologist to take X-rays of each breast. The large machine has a platform for your breast. The technologist will place your breast on the platform and put a plate on the breast to press it gently. This may be uncomfortable for a few seconds, but it allows the X-ray to show more of the tissue deep within your breast. Two or three different views of each breast will be taken to check the whole breast. Each X-ray position requires just a few seconds.

## **What happens after the procedure?**

The X-rays will be read by a radiologist and the results reported to your healthcare provider. You will also get a letter from the radiologist.

All women age 40 to 70 years old, who are in good health, should be screened for breast cancer with mammography every 1 to 2 years after counseling by their healthcare provider about the possible risks and benefits of the procedure.

Comparing mammograms from year to year can help detect early cancer. If you are over 70, ask your healthcare provider how often you should have a mammogram. If you have a risk for breast cancer that is much higher than average and you are 25 years old or older, ask your healthcare provider when you should start having mammograms and how often you should have them. If you have a very high risk, you may consider seeing a breast specialist.

Your healthcare provider should give you a breast exam once a year. In addition, you should do a breast self-exam every month, even if you have an exam by your provider and a mammogram every year.

## **What are the benefits of this procedure?**

Mammograms help your healthcare provider diagnose breast problems. Most commonly, they help find breast cancer at an early stage. The smaller and the more localized a cancer is at the time of diagnosis and treatment, the greater the chance of a cure. The mammogram allows the detection of some types of breast cancer 1 to 2 years before you or your healthcare provider would be able to feel it. There is a better chance of curing the cancer if it is found at an early stage.

## **What are the risks associated with this procedure?**

There are no known significant risks from having mammograms according to the recommended screening schedule. Discuss any concerns you have with your healthcare provider.

Mammograms do not detect all breast cancers. About 1 out of every 4 or 5 breast cancers are missed by a mammogram and found only when they are felt with the fingers. If you feel a lump in your breast, report it right away to your provider even if you have had a recent mammogram that did not find any cancer.

## **When should I call my healthcare provider?**

- Call your provider right away for an appointment if you find any change in your breasts when you do a self-exam, especially if you find a lump.
- Call your provider during office hours if you have questions about the procedure or its result.