

What Is a Mammogram?



One way to be screened for breast cancer is to get a mammogram (MAM-o-gram). A mammogram is a special type of X-ray of the breast.

Mammograms: Providing a Closer Look

Mammograms are one of the best screening tools to detect cancer before it has grown and spread. This makes it more likely that cancer treatment will be a success.

Women who are 40 and older should have a mammogram once a year. If you are a woman who is at high risk of getting breast cancer, talk to your doctor about whether you should start getting mammograms before age 40. Remember, a mammogram may find cancer before you or your doctor can see or feel anything wrong in your breast.

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer in women. A mammography (mam-AH-gruh-fee), a special breast X-ray, lowers the number of deaths from breast cancer.

When you go in for a mammogram, you will undress above the waist and wear a hospital gown. You will stand in front of an X-ray machine. The mammogram technician will help get your breasts into the right position on the X-ray plates. Then pictures of your breasts will be taken.

What else can you do to help prevent breast cancer?

- Improve your health by eating healthy and exercising.
- Get screened regularly.

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Know Your Risk Factors

What increases a woman's chance of getting breast cancer?

- **Age.** About 8 out of 10 breast cancers occur in women older than 50.
- **Genetics.** About 10% of breast cancer can be linked to certain changes in genes.
- **Family history.** The risk increases for a woman with close blood relatives who have had breast cancer.
- **Personal history.** Cancer in one breast can increase the likelihood of cancer in the other.
- **Race.** White women are at a slightly higher risk of getting breast cancer. African American women have a higher death rate from breast cancer.
- **Menstrual periods.** The risk increases if a woman started menstruating before the age of 12 or menopause occurred after the age of 55.
- **Alcohol.** 2 to 5 alcoholic drinks per day increase the risk 1.5 times compared with women who do not drink.

- **Weight.** Overweight women have a greater risk of breast cancer, especially women who have gained weight after the change of life (menopause) or after turning 60.

Do all you can to help detect breast cancer early. Besides getting regular mammograms:

- Do regular breast self-exams.
- Have your breasts examined by your doctor regularly.

If my mammogram results are abnormal, does this mean I have cancer?

No. Many times results from mammograms are not normal. If this happens, you will be called to come in for more testing. Most of the time, the results of these further tests show that there is no cancer.

