

What is a Mammography?

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Mammography is a detailed x-ray of the breast that can detect abnormalities even before a lump is felt. Mammography is the best single test for detecting abnormalities, which can be an early sign of breast cancer. It can show changes in the breast up to 2 years before a patient or physician can feel them. Most experts agree that early detection is the key to successful treatment of breast cancer.

What is the difference between a screening and a diagnostic Mammogram?

Screening mammography is used to detect breast changes in women who have no signs or symptoms or observable breast abnormalities.

Diagnostic mammography is used to investigate suspicious breast changes such as lumps, pain, an unusual skin appearance, nipple thickening, or nipple discharge. It is also used to evaluate abnormal findings from a screening mammogram.

Are there any contradictions to having a Mammogram?

You should not have a *screening* mammogram if:

- You are pregnant.
- You are breast feeding.
- It has been less than 12 months from your previous mammogram.
- You are younger than 35, unless you have an immediate relative, such as

mother or sister, with breast cancer diagnosed before the age of 45.

If you have breast implants, it is important to tell the scheduler this when calling to make the appointment. This is because your exam will involve a few more films to be taken with the implants in different positions.

How do I prepare for my Mammogram?

- Try not to schedule your exam when your breasts are tender. Usually one to two weeks after your menstrual period is ideal.
- Please check with your insurance company if this exam is covered and please bring your insurance card on the day of your exam.
- You will be asked to remove clothes from your waist up. A robe will be given to you to cover your upper body, but wearing pants or a skirt is usually more comfortable than a dress.
- Do not wear any deodorant, lotion, or powder under your arms or around your breasts prior to the exam.
- Before your exam, tell the technologist if you are feeling any lumps or have noticed any changes since your last exam.
- Always try to obtain any prior mammograms or breast ultrasound exams if done elsewhere. Please bring these in on the day of your exam.

How is the Mammogram performed?

The technologist will position your breasts on a special platform. She will take a total of 4 films. She will take 1 view from the front and 1 view from the side of each breast.

The technologist will need to apply compression to your breasts. This is achieved by having a clear plastic or Plexiglass paddle gradually compress your breast until your breast is taut. Compression is needed to obtain the best possible image, while using the least amount of radiation possible. Compression is not dangerous and does not alter the breast in any way; but it can be uncomfortable.

This exam usually takes 20 to 30 minutes.

What are the limitations of Mammography?

- Mammograms can be difficult to interpret without prior mammograms for comparison because the pattern of breast tissue is not the same for each

woman. That is why it is so important to bring prior mammograms with you for comparison.

- A small percent of screening mammogram patients will have a questionable finding, which will require additional testing such as special mammographic images, breast ultrasound or a breast biopsy.
- While a mammogram is still the best screening tool to detect breast cancer, it does not find all breast cancers. It is very important to do a monthly self breast exam and to have a clinical breast exam by your physician once a year.

****If you feel a lump or notice a change in your breast, call your physician immediately, even if you have just recently had a negative mammogram.**

Source: <http://medlineplus.gov> Retrieved May 2007.

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