

What is a Mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. It is a breast cancer screening tool. It can find breast cancer in a person who does not have any symptoms. Overall, it is the best screening tool we have today to find breast cancer early in most women. It can find breast cancer when it is very small, even too small to feel. It can also detect calcifications as well as abnormal changes to the skin.

A mammogram can also be used as a follow-up test when a problem is found on a screening mammogram or a clinical breast exam. This is called a diagnostic mammogram.

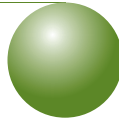
Approximate Size of Tumors Found on a Screening Mammogram

Compared to U.S. Coins

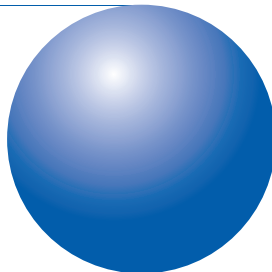
Average-size lump found by yearly mammogram when past images can be compared.



Average-size lump found by first mammogram.



Average-size lump found by accident.



What to Expect on the Day of the Exam

On the day of the exam, it is a good idea to wear a shirt you can remove easily. Don't use deodorant, perfume, powder or lotion. Ingredients in these products can show up on a mammogram and make it hard to read. Getting a screening mammogram takes about 15 minutes.

During the exam, each breast is pressed between two plates and an X-ray image is made. Two views of each breast are taken, one from top to bottom and the other from side to side.

Whether you need a screening mammogram or a diagnostic mammogram, the exam is about the same. You may have more views with a diagnostic mammogram though.

Questions & Answers about Mammography

Are mammograms painful?

Getting a mammogram shouldn't hurt. You may feel some pressure as the technologist flattens the breast, but it only lasts a few seconds.

Is the radiation harmful?

Being exposed to a small amount of radiation during a mammogram can increase the risk of breast cancer over time, but this increase in risk is very small. Studies show that the benefits of mammography outweigh the risks.

How can I get a mammogram?

Call your doctor for a referral.

What if I cannot afford a mammogram?

The Affordable Care Act requires all new health insurance plans to cover mammography for women ages 40 and older. This includes Medicare and Medicaid. There are also many free or low cost programs. Call our breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) for information about low cost programs that may be in your area.

1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) www.komen.org

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