



Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women in the United States. About 1 in 8 U.S. women will develop invasive breast cancer over the course of their lifetime. However, the good news is that mammograms can detect breast cancer early — when it's most treatable.

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast that doctors use to check for cysts and tumors in the breast, including cancerous, noncancerous or benign tumors. When a mammogram is performed when there are no symptoms such as lumps or pain, it is referred to as a screening mammogram.

The older a person is, the more likely they are to get breast cancer. Therefore, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends women who are aged 50 to 74 years old and are at average risk for breast cancer get a screening mammogram every two years.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT DURING A MAMMOGRAM?

Many women find the test uncomfortable, but the screening mammogram only takes a few moments and the discomfort is over soon. What you feel depends on the size of your breasts, and how much they need to be compressed. Here are some tips to help you prepare for a better mammogram experience:

- Try not to have your mammogram the week before you get your period or during your period, as your breasts may be tender or swollen.
- On the day of your mammogram, don't wear deodorant, perfume, or powder. These products can show up as white spots on the X-ray.
- Some women prefer to wear a top with a skirt or pants, instead of a dress. You will need to undress from your waist up for the mammogram.

HOW IS A MAMMOGRAM DONE?

You will stand in front of a special X-ray machine. A technologist will place your breast on a clear plastic plate. Another plate will firmly press your breast from above. The plates will flatten the breast, holding it still while the X-ray is taken. You will feel some pressure. The steps are repeated to make a side view of the breast. The other breast will be X-rayed in the same way. You will then wait while the technologist checks the X-rays to make sure you don't need additional images. Keep in mind that the technologist cannot tell you the results of your screening mammogram. Instead, you will most likely receive the results within a few days, usually from the doctor who ordered it.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO TO HELP REDUCE YOUR RISK OF BREAST CANCER?

Many factors over the course of a lifetime can influence breast cancer risk. You can't change some factors, such as getting older or your family history, but you can help lower your risk of breast cancer by taking care of your health in the following ways:

- Keep a healthy weight
- Exercise regularly
- Don't drink alcohol, or limit alcoholic drinks to no more than one per day
- If you are taking or are considering taking hormone replacement therapy or oral contraceptives (birth control pills), ask your doctor about the risks and benefits and find out if it is right for you
- Breastfeed your babies from birth, if possible
- If you have a family history of breast and/or ovarian or other cancers or inherited changes in your BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, talk with your doctor about other ways to lower your risk

If you have any questions about breast cancer or mammograms, speak with your doctor.

Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control.

