

7 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GETTING A MAMMOGRAM

Mammograms (breast X-rays) are the best screening tool we have to find breast cancer early, when it's easier to treat. After you and your health care professional establish a screening schedule, it'll help to know what to expect so it can go as smoothly as possible. Here's what you need to know.

A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast that's used to find breast changes. X-rays were first used to examine breast tissue nearly a century ago. Today, the x-ray machines used for mammograms produce lower-energy x-rays and expose the breast to much less radiation compared with those in the past.

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WHAT IS A MAMMOGRAM?

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WHERE TO GET IT

Find a center that specializes in mammograms. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) certifies mammogram facilities that meet high professional standards of quality and safety. Ask to see the FDA certificate if one isn't posted near the receptionist's desk. And when you find a facility you like, stick with it. Having all your mammograms at the same facility will make it easier for doctors to compare images from one year to the next. If you've had mammograms done at other facilities, have those images sent to your new facility.

It's best to schedule your mammogram about a week after your menstrual period. Your breasts won't be as tender or swollen, which means less discomfort during the x-ray.

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WHEN TO SCHEDULE IT

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WHAT (AND WHAT NOT) TO WEAR

Wear a 2-piece outfit because you will need to remove your top and bra. Do not apply deodorant, antiperspirant, powder, lotion, or ointment on or around your chest on the day of your mammogram. These products can appear as white spots on the x-ray.

The entire procedure takes about 20 minutes. The breast is compressed between two plastic plates for a few seconds while an x-ray is taken. It's repositioned (and compressed again) to take another view. This is then done on the other breast. Flattening the breast can be uncomfortable, but is needed to provide a clearer view.

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WHAT TO EXPECT

RESULTS

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GETTING THE RESULTS

You should get your results within 10 days. If you don't, you should call to ask about them. If doctors find something suspicious, you'll likely be contacted within a week to take new pictures or get other tests. But that doesn't mean you have cancer. A suspicious finding may be just dense breast tissue or a cyst. Other times, the image just isn't clear and needs to be retaken. If this is your first mammogram, your doctor may want to look at an area more closely simply because there is no previous mammogram for comparison.

For uninsured or low-income women, free or low-cost mammogram services are available. Some of these programs are held during National Breast Cancer Month in October, while others are offered year round. Call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** to find a program near you.

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WHAT YOU PAY



Visit cancer.org/FightBreastCancer for more breast cancer information and support.