

MAMMOGRAM

I. What is a mammogram?

Mammogram is an X-ray examination of the breast. Mammography is used to detect and diagnose breast disease both in women who have breast symptoms such as a lump, pain, or nipple discharge, and women with no symptoms.

II. Why do I need a mammogram?

A woman's risk of developing breast cancer increases as she gets older. Over 3/4 of breast cancers diagnosed each year occur in women over age 50. In many cases, women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of the disease. Some breast cancer often has no symptoms early in the disease. A mammogram can detect cancer in its early stage when it is still too small to be felt. Finding breast cancer early can save your life.

III. Is mammogram safe?

Over the past 20 years, mammography techniques and equipment have improved a great deal, and today the level of radiation is very low and not harmful.

IV. What is it like to get a mammogram?

When you get a mammogram, you stand beside the machine, and a specially trained technologist places your breast on a plastic plate. A second piece of plastic is placed on top and for a few seconds, some pressure is applied to flatten the breast and get a good, clear picture. Two pictures usually are taken of each breast. Some women may feel a little discomfort, but most report none. The entire mammography exam takes about 15 minutes. A specialist, called radiologist, will read the mammogram to see if any suspicious areas exist.

If you have sensitive breasts, try having your mammogram at a time of the month when your breasts will be least tender. Try to avoid the week right before your period. This will help to lessen discomfort.

Don't wear deodorant, powder, or cream, under your arms - it may interfere with the quality of the mammogram. It's a good idea to wear a blouse with a skirt or slacks, rather than a dress, since you will have to undress above the waist.

Mammogram may still be performed if a patient has breast implants as long as the technician is notified.

V. What happens if they find something?

If a mass is found, the doctor will perform a biopsy, which involves taking out part or all of the suspicious tissue. It is then examined under a microscope by a specialist called a pathologist. A biopsy is the only sure way to know if cancer is present. It's important to remember that even if you are told you need a biopsy, more than 80% of lumps or suspicious areas are not cancer.

If the biopsy shows that there is cancer, the woman and her doctor will discuss treatment options. Early cancer often can be treated by removing the lump or a portion of the breast rather than the whole breast.

VI. How often do I need a mammogram?

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation recommends mammogram **yearly** for women aged 40 and older. Depending upon your health history, your doctor may recommend a baseline mammogram at 35 years old.

VII. How can I get a mammogram?

Mammograms are covered by Medicare, MediCal, and most private health insurance plans. Many public health departments, hospitals, and clinics may also offer low-cost or free mammograms. In California, women may also receive free mammograms through the Cancer Detection Programs: Every Woman Counts (CDPEWC).

For help in finding a place to get a quality mammogram, call the Chinese Community Cancer Information Center at (415) 677-2458.