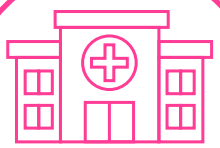
7 Things to know about getting a mammogram

Mammograms (breast x-rays) are the best tests we have to find breast cancer early, when it may be easier to treat. Talk with your health care provider about when you should get a mammogram. Here's what you need to know about getting a mammogram.



1 What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast that's used to find breast changes. Mammograms are done with a machine that only looks at breast tissue. The machine takes x-rays at lower doses of radiation than the x-rays done to look at other parts of the body.



2 Where to get it

Find a center that does many mammograms in a day. When you find a center you like, stick with it. Having all your mammograms at the same place will make it easier for doctors to compare images from one year to the next. If you've had mammograms done at other centers, have those images sent to your new center.



3 When to schedule it

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 mammogram.

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4 What (and what not) to wear

Wear a 2-piece outfit because you will need to remove your top and bra. **Do not** use 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.

5 What to expect

The entire process takes about 20 minutes. The breast is compressed between 2 plastic plates for a few seconds while an x-ray is taken. The plates are moved to a new position and the breast compressed again to take another view. The same process is done on the other breast. Flattening the breast can be uncomfortable, but is needed to provide the clearest view.

6 Getting the results

You should get your results within 10 days. If you don't, call to ask about them. If doctors find an area that looks different from the rest of your breast, you'll likely need to get new x-rays taken or get other tests. But that doesn't mean you have cancer. The doctor may have seen 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 because there is no previous mammogram to compare it with.

7 What you pay

For women who are uninsured or can't afford the cost, free or low-cost mammogram services are available. Some of these programs are held during National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, while others are offered year around. Call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** to find a program near you.

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