

What is a mammogram?

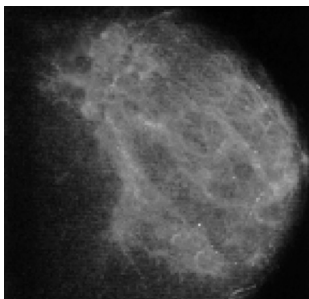
A mammogram is an X-ray image of the breast. A screening mammogram is used to find early signs of breast cancer. It is the best screening tool used today to find breast cancer. It can find breast cancer early when it is small and the chance of survival is highest. A diagnostic mammogram is used to help check areas of concern found on a screening test, such as a mammogram or clinical exam.

Women with a family history of breast cancer or other concerns should talk with their doctor about when to start getting mammograms.

How can a mammogram find breast cancer?

Mammogram images are stored on a computer (digital mammography). A radiologist looks at the images for signs of breast cancer. The images can be lightened or darkened or enlarged to see more closely. These images can be compared from year to year to see if changes have occurred.

A mammogram is good at finding breast cancer, especially in women ages 50 and older. However, it is not perfect. It is possible for a woman to have breast cancer that doesn't show on a mammogram. That is why it is important to know how your breasts normally look and feel. If you notice any change, see your doctor and tell the technologist about any changes at the time of your mammogram.



A mammogram without signs of cancer.



Common questions about mammograms

Why would I want to find out if I have cancer?

Finding breast cancer early offers the greatest chance for survival.

What if my doctor hasn't brought up the idea of getting a mammogram?

Bring up the subject yourself to see if you should get a mammogram.

Am I too old to get a mammogram?

Your chance of getting breast cancer increases as you get older. In general, women who are in good health and could benefit from treatment (if breast cancer were found) should get screened. If there is any question about whether you should have a mammogram, talk to your doctor.

Is it painful to get a mammogram?

Getting a mammogram shouldn't hurt. Each breast is pressed between two plates to get a good X-ray image. Sometimes, the pressure is uncomfortable, but it only lasts a few seconds. Tell the technologist if you feel discomfort. Taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen about an hour before the exam may help. If you have concerns, talk to your provider about other ways to ease discomfort (or anxiety) during a mammogram. And, before the exam, let your technologist know your concerns.

What if I cannot afford a mammogram?

Under the Affordable Care Act, all new health insurance plans are required to cover mammography (with no co-payment) 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) or your state health department for information about low-cost programs in your area.

How to get a mammogram in six easy steps

1. Choose a certified mammography center.

Your doctor may refer you to a center or you may choose one that is near you (such as a mobile mammography van). Wherever you go, be sure to check the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at www.fda.gov to be sure it is a certified center.

2. Pick a good time.

A mammogram may be uncomfortable if you have sensitive breasts. If you still have periods, plan to have your mammogram the week after your period, when your breasts are less tender.

3. Gather your information.

When you make your appointment, you will be asked about:

- Personal history of breast cancer,
- Family history of breast cancer,
- Current breast problems,
- Past breast surgery,
- The date(s) of your past mammogram(s), and
- The name and address of your doctor and any center where you've had a mammogram before.

4. Come prepared.

Before the test, you will undress from the waist up. It is a good idea to wear a shirt you can remove easily. Don't use deodorants, antiperspirants, perfumes, powders or lotions on your breasts or underarm areas on the day of the exam. Ingredients in these products can show up on a mammogram and make it harder to read.

If you had a mammogram before at a different center, bring your past mammograms with you. Or, bring the name and address of the previous mammography center.

During your visit, be sure you ask:

- How and when you will get the results, and
- When you need to come back.

5. Get your results.

If you do not have your results within two weeks, call your doctor or the center. Don't assume your results are normal if you have not received a report.

6. Talk with your doctor about your results.

If your mammogram shows anything unusual or that you have dense breasts, talk with your doctor about what to do next.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)

www.komen.org

American College of Radiology (ACR)

1-800-227-5463

www.acr.org

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332)

www.fda.gov

National Cancer Institute (NCI)

1-800-4-CANCER

www.cancer.gov

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Density
- Imaging Methods Used to Find Breast Cancer
- Screening and Early Detection
- When You Discover a Lump or Change

The above list of resources is only a suggested resource and is not a complete listing of breast cancer materials or information. The information contained herein is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. Komen does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referenced herein.