

Mammogram

According to experts, a mammogram is the best screening tool for detecting breast cancer at its earliest, most treatable stages. Using special x-ray imaging, a mammogram can reveal both harmless and cancerous growths even when they are too small to be felt through a breast self-exam or clinical breast exam. An annual mammogram is recommended for women age 40 and over. If you have a family or personal history of breast cancer, your doctor may recommend beginning annual mammograms earlier.

Two types of mammograms

Screening

This type of mammogram is used for women who are asymptomatic, meaning they have no complaints or symptoms of breast cancer. Its purpose is to identify breast abnormalities before they can be detected through breast self-exams or clinical breast exams. Screening mammograms generally involve taking x-rays from two views of each breast and can be completed in less than 15 minutes. According to the FDA, screening mammograms can detect 85% to 90% of all breast cancers.

Diagnostic

A diagnostic mammogram is administered to women who are experiencing symptoms of breast cancer or have detected a breast abnormality. It involves a more thorough examination and is used to determine the exact size and location of the breast abnormality. Diagnostic mammograms generally take several x-ray views of the breast and require approximately 30 minutes to complete. Women with breast implants or a personal history of breast cancer will usually require a diagnostic mammogram.

What to expect

Mammograms are typically quick and easy. Usually, they are performed in an outpatient facility, like your doctor's office, a hospital clinic or a mobile van.

During the mammogram procedure, you will need to remove your clothes from the waist up. For this reason, you may want to wear loose clothing and a shirt that you can take off easily. You will also want to refrain from wearing any deodorant, lotions or powders. These substances can alter the x-ray quality.

When getting a mammogram, the technologist will position you at the x-ray machine. Your breast will be firmly pressed between two plastic plates in order to flatten the breast tissue. This is an important step because it allows better visualization of the entire breast while using the lowest possible amount of radiation. Your breast should be compressed for only a few seconds.

Results

After your mammogram is completed, a radiologist (a physician who specializes in interpreting x-ray images) will examine the films and determine if there are breast abnormalities that need further exploration. If your mammogram results are not back within 10 days, contact your doctor or the mammogram facility. Don't assume that the results are normal just because you haven't received them. If the mammogram does show a breast abnormality, talk with your doctor about the appropriate next steps.

Source: www.mammotome.com

