



Mammogram

ABOUT THIS TEST

Mammogram: About This Test

What is it?

A mammogram is an X-ray test of the breasts (mammary glands) used to screen for breast problems, such as a lump, and whether a lump is fluid-filled (a cyst) or a solid mass.

A mammogram is done to help screen for or detect breast cancer. Many small tumors can be seen on a mammogram before they can be felt by a woman or her doctor. Cancer is most easily treated and cured when it is discovered in an early stage. Mammograms do not prevent breast cancer or reduce a woman's risk of developing cancer. But regular mammograms can reduce a woman's risk of dying from breast cancer by detecting a cancer when it is more easily treated.

Why is this test done?

A mammogram is done to:

- Screen for breast cancer in women without symptoms.
- Detect breast cancer in women with symptoms. Symptoms of breast cancer may include a lump or thickening in the breast, nipple discharge, or dimpling of the skin on one area of the breast.
- Locate an area of suspicious breast tissue to remove for examination under a microscope (biopsy) when an abnormality is found.

How can you prepare for the test?

If you have previously had a mammogram done at another clinic, have the results sent or bring them with you to your examination.

Tell the mammogram technologist if you:

- Are or might be pregnant. A mammogram is an X-ray test with exposure to low-dose radiation and is not done for routine screening during pregnancy.
- Are breast-feeding. A mammogram may not provide clear results in breasts that contain milk.
- Have breast implants. Breast implants require a modified mammogram method.
- Have previously had a breast biopsy. Knowing the location of scar tissue will help the radiologist read your mammogram accurately.
- On the day of the mammogram, do not use any deodorant, perfume, powders, or ointments on your breasts. The residue left on your skin by these substances may interfere with the X-rays.
- If you are still having menstrual periods, you may want to have your mammogram done within 2 weeks after your menstrual period ends. The procedure will be more comfortable, especially if your breasts become tender before your period starts.

How it is done

A mammogram is done by a mammogram technologist.

You will be asked to undress above the waist. You will be given a gown to drape around your shoulders.

Remove all jewelry from around your neck.

If you are concerned about an area of your breast, show the technologist so that the area can be noted.

You usually stand during a mammogram. One at a time, your breasts will be placed on a flat plate that contains the X-ray film. Another plate is then pressed firmly against your breast to help flatten out the breast tissue. Very firm compression is needed to obtain high-quality pictures. You may be asked to lift your arm. For a few seconds while the X-ray picture is being taken, you will need to hold your breath. Usually at least two pictures are taken of each breast: one from the top and one from the side.

A mammogram is often uncomfortable but rarely extremely painful. Having your breasts flattened and squeezed is usually uncomfortable. But it is necessary to flatten out the breast tissue to obtain the best pictures.

Results

The X-ray pictures (mammograms) are interpreted by a doctor who specializes in evaluating X-rays (radiologist). Mammogram results are usually available within 10 days. It is not uncommon to be asked to return for another test so an additional view of an area in question can be obtained.