

MAMMOGRAM DECISION & INFORMATION GUIDE



Clinical breast exam:

A clinical breast exam (CBE) is an exam of the breast done by a doctor or nurse who is trained to find lumps and changes in the skin. The doctor or nurse will feel the breasts and under the arms for lumps or anything else that seems unusual.

Mammogram:

A mammogram is an x-ray picture of the breast. Mammograms are the best way to find cancer early, when it is easier to treat and before it can be felt or cause symptoms.

What is a diagnostic mammogram?

A diagnostic mammogram is used when there is a problem with the breast, such as nipple discharge or a lump, or if your screening mammogram shows abnormal results. An abnormality found during your screening mammogram does not mean you have breast cancer; it just means that the doctor needs to do more testing.

A diagnostic mammogram may include more x-rays than your original mammogram. An ultrasound machine or an MRI may also be used in a diagnostic mammogram. A doctor could use an ultrasound if they can feel a mass but cannot see it on the mammogram or to look at a specific area of the breast. An MRI could be used if a mammogram and ultrasound do not produce clear enough images.

What is dense breast tissue?

Breasts are made up of lobules, ducts, and fatty and fibrous connective tissue. When the breast has more fibrous connective tissue than fatty connective tissue, we say that the tissue is dense.

Dense breast tissue is very common, but it can present a problem with regular screening mammograms. Dense breast tissue shows up white on a mammogram, the same color as anything abnormal. Because of this, a doctor might not be able to see a lump by using a mammogram on women with dense breast tissue.

There is no way to tell if you have dense breast tissue until you have a mammogram. If you have dense breast tissue, your doctor will tell you when they get your mammogram results, and then you can choose to talk about additional screening methods together, such as an MRI or ultrasound. It is important to talk to your doctor about what is best for you.



What are risk factors that increase the chance of getting breast cancer?

Tell your doctor if you fit any of the descriptions below. Having one of these risk factors may be reason to start breast cancer screenings earlier:

- A family history of breast cancer, especially a mother, sister or daughter
- A personal history with breast cancer or a non-cancerous breast disease
- A genetic mutation in your BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes
- A history of radiation therapy to the chest prior to age 40
- Having your first menstrual period before age 12
- Giving birth for the first time after age 35 or never giving birth
- Using hormone replacement therapy for a long time
- Certain ethnicities, like African Americans and women of Eastern European Jewish decent