

How to Prepare for a Mammogram

Randomized controlled trials suggest that mammography screening reduces the odds of dying of breast cancer by

15–20%

for women aged 40–74.¹

According to Breastcancer.org, finding breast cancer early reduces the risk of dying from the disease by

25–30%

or more.²

Find a facility that's accredited by the American College of Radiology.

The ACR sets industry standards for safety, quality assurance, training, and equipment. Their accreditation process subjects facilities to rigorous review to ensure standards are met and designates select facilities as Breast Imaging Centers of Excellence (BICOE).

A study published in Cancer found that most cancer deaths occur in women who are not undergoing regular screening, and the median age for diagnosis of fatal breast cancer is

49³

Finding cancers early with routine mammograms can prolong life and also allow women to choose more conservative treatment, maintaining a higher quality of life.

Find a facility that offers 3-D mammography

Rather than providing just two flat images like older digital mammography, a 3-D mammogram captures a series of images from an array of angles, which are then synthesized by the computer to create three-dimensional images of each breast. As a result, 3-D mammograms are now being found to significantly increase invasive cancer detection and, at the same time, substantially reduce the number of women called back for follow-up procedures.⁴



How to Prepare for a Mammogram

Planning ahead will give you the opportunity to schedule your appointment at a time when you can be as comfortable as possible and gather any relevant medical information.

- Mammograms involve pressure and manipulation of your breast tissue. Schedule your mammogram during your menstrual cycle when your breasts are least tender (usually the week after your period.)
- If caffeine enhances your breast tenderness, consider cutting back in the days before your mammogram.
- Avoid using products such as deodorants, powders, lotions, or perfumes under your arms or on your breasts during your mammogram.
- Tell your imaging provider about any medical history relating to your breasts, including whether you have or ever had breast implants. If this isn't your first mammogram, obtain previous images and records prior to your mammogram.



On the day of your mammogram, dressing in a two-piece outfit will allow you to remain fully dressed from the waist down during the exam; for coverage from the waist up, you'll be given a gown. The technologist will handle your breasts to get them into position, but a good mammography technologist will know how to distract you with light conversation to make this as comfortable as possible. The exam itself is quick, often taking just fifteen minutes.

If you've had a mammogram before and know that it causes you significant discomfort, you may take over-the-counter pain medication prior to your procedure. Most women do not require this, however.

What to Expect

The technologist will position your breast in the machine, compressing it between two plates. During breast tomosynthesis (3-D mammography), the machine moves in an arc over the breast. You will be asked to hold your breath briefly while the images are taken to avoid blurring. The entire exam takes approximately 15 minutes. The technologist will then look at the images to make sure they are the best possible quality; more images will be taken as needed to ensure accurate results. If your exam is at Iowa Radiology, your radiologist will report your results to your referring doctor within one business day and mail you written results, which you should receive within one week. If the radiologist determines that follow-up is necessary, then we will contact you to schedule an additional appointment.

Is a Mammogram Callback Bad News?

If you happen to get a callback after your mammogram, don't panic. Most often, additional imaging resolves the radiologist's questions, and no biopsy or other intervention is needed. In the event your follow up progresses beyond additional imaging, a Breast Imaging Center of Excellence can continue to serve you. Of the approximately 10% of mammograms that result in a callback,

8 – 10%

will receive biopsy recommendations; of that fraction who undergo biopsies, 80% come back negative for cancer.⁵

¹ "Mammography: Benefits, Risks, What You Need to Know." Breastcancer.org. 9 March 2018. Accessed 8 Feb 2019. | ² Ibid. | ³ Webb, M.L., et al. "A failure analysis of invasive breast cancer: most deaths from disease occur in women not regularly screened." Cancer. American Cancer Society, 9 Sept 2013. Accessed 13 Feb 2019. | ⁴ Freidewald, et al. "Breast Cancer Screening Using Tomosynthesis in Combination With Digital Mammography." JAMA. American Medical Association, 25 June 2014. Accessed 13 Feb 2019. | ⁵ Uscher. "Suspicious Mammogram Result: Now What?" WebMD. Accessed 13 Feb 2019.