

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. These X-rays make a 2D image of the breast. During the exam, each breast is pressed between 2 plates. Two views of each breast are taken, one from the top and the other from the side.

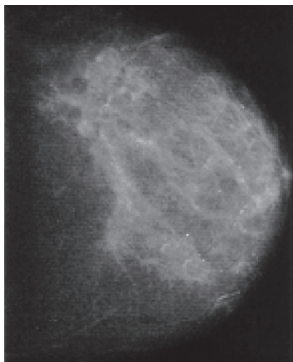
A mammogram can find breast cancer in a person who doesn't have any warning signs or symptoms. It can find breast cancer when it's too small to feel. This is called a **screening mammogram**. It's the best screening test we have today to find breast cancer in most women.

A mammogram can also be used as a follow-up test. This is called a **diagnostic mammogram**. This may be done after a change is found:

- on a screening mammogram,
- during a clinical breast exam or
- by you or your partner.

A diagnostic mammogram can't diagnose breast cancer though. Other image tests may be done after a diagnostic mammogram to get a further look at the change.

If the findings suggest breast cancer, a **biopsy** will be needed to diagnose (or rule out) breast cancer.



A mammogram without signs of cancer.

What is a 3D mammogram?

A 3D mammogram takes multiple 2D images to create a 3D image. Some studies have shown 3D mammograms may find a few more breast cancers than 2D, but this is under study. 2D is the current standard of care.



What to expect on the day of the test

A screening mammogram takes about 15 minutes.

- Wear a shirt you can remove easily.
- Don't use deodorant, perfume, powder or lotion under your arms or on your breasts. These products can show up on a mammogram and make it hard to read.

Findings on a mammogram

A mammogram may show:

- No signs of breast cancer
- A benign (not cancer) condition
- An abnormal finding that needs follow-up tests to rule out cancer

You should get the results within 2 weeks. If you don't, call your doctor.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)
komen.org

American Cancer Society

1-800-ACS-2345
cancer.org

National Cancer Institute

1-800-4-CANCER
cancer.gov

Related educational resources:

- [Breast Self-Awareness Messages](#)
- [Benign Breast Conditions](#)
- [Breast Density](#)
- [Breast Density - Questions to Ask Your Doctor](#)
- [Breast Cancer Screening & Follow-Up Tests](#)
- [If You Find a Breast Lump or Change](#)
- [Mammography - Questions to Ask Your Doctor](#)
- [Quality Mammography Video](#)
- [What is Breast Cancer](#)



Questions & answers about mammography

When should I get a mammogram?

Talk with your doctor about when and how often to get a mammogram. Susan G. Komen believes all women should have access to regular screening mammograms when they and their doctors decide it's best based on their risk of breast cancer.

Are mammograms painful?

You may feel some pressure but getting a mammogram shouldn't hurt. Tell the technologist if you have any concerns or if you feel any discomfort during the test.

Is the radiation in a mammogram harmful?

Being exposed to a small amount of radiation during a mammogram can increase the risk of breast cancer over time. This increase in risk is small. Studies show the benefits outweigh the risks.

What should I do if I'm told I have dense breasts?

There are no special recommendations or screening guidelines for women with dense breasts. Talk with your doctor about what imaging tests they recommend for you.

What if I can't afford a mammogram?

The Affordable Care Act requires all new health insurance plans to cover screening mammograms every 1-2 years for women 40 and older. This includes Medicare and Medicaid. Call our breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) for information about low cost programs in your area. Sign up for your screening reminder at komen.org/reminder!

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