

Are You Afraid of Finding You Have Breast Cancer?

There are two approaches a woman can take. One is to approach life avoiding the possibility of finding out you may have a serious disease. Another option is to use modern technology to detect a deadly disease in its early stages.

Annual mammograms, self examinations and clinical exams are the best tools available for early detection of breast cancer. All women share the risk of getting breast cancer. Regular screenings make it possible to detect breast cancer in its earliest stages and can be vital to your survival. Performing monthly breast self-exams, clinical breast exams and annual mammograms increases your chances of early detection.

Become familiar with your body. If you notice any lumps, nipple discharge or changes in the appearance of your breasts, notify your doctor immediately.



FAQS



1. What increases my risk of breast cancer?

In addition to age, other factors may increase a women's risk of breast cancer. The strongest risk factors are a history of breast cancer in a family member, especially a mother or sister, having already been diagnosed with breast cancer or having had a previous breast biopsy showing atypical hyperplasia (an irregular pattern of cell growth).

2. Should I be concerned about the radiation dose during a mammogram?

No. The risk of harm from radiation is minute compared to the benefits of early breast cancer detection. The federal government through the Mammogram Quality Standards Act (MQSA) has established a maximum radiation dose limit that is considered to be safe. There have been major improvements in mammography. Women receive 50 times less radiation than they received 20 years ago, with the risk of long-term effects being almost zero.

3. What is a screening mammogram?

A screening mammogram is a quick and easy way to detect breast cancer early. It is an x-ray of the breast that doctors use to look for breast changes in women with no symptoms of breast cancer. Usually, 2 x-ray pictures are taken of each breast. Screening for breast cancer is best achieved when you include both mammography and a clinical breast exam in the screening process.

4. Will additional studies be recommended after the screening?

Possibly. If the Radiologist feels that additional imaging procedures are necessary, you will be informed by letter and asked to make an appointment for these studies.

5. What is a diagnostic or comprehensive mammogram?

A doctor uses a diagnostic or comprehensive mammogram to help learn the causes of a woman's breast problems such as a breast mass, skin changes or nipple discharge. Diagnostic or comprehensive mammography takes a little longer than screening mammography because more x-rays are taken during the exam.

6. Who interprets the results and when should I receive them?

A Radiologist is a physician experienced in mammography and other x-ray examinations, and will analyze the images, describe any abnormalities and suggest a likely diagnosis. This analysis is conveyed to your doctor with any follow-up recommendations.

NVCH will also provide you with a written letter containing the results of the exam. The results are mailed to you within 30 days after the exam. The report is worded in a way that is easy to understand.

7. What are the benefits of having a mammogram?

Imaging the breasts improves a physician's ability to detect small tumors. When cancers are small, women have more treatment options and a higher success rate. Regular screening mammograms, though not perfect, are the best method available for early detection of breast cancer.



Mammography



What You Should Know

What Is A Mammogram?

A mammogram is a specific imaging test that uses a low-dose x-ray system for examination of the breasts. The images of the breasts can be viewed on film at a view box. Most medical experts agree that successful treatment of breast cancer often is linked to early detection. A mammogram can detect changes in the breast up to two years before a patient or physician.



What You Need To Know

The Age A Woman Should Have A Mammogram

The American Cancer Society (ACS) makes a clear recommendation for every woman, beginning at the age of 40, to have a screening mammogram once a year. Those women who have had breast cancer and those who are at increased risk due to a genetic history of breast cancer should seek medical advice about whether they should begin screening before age 40 and about the frequency of screening.

The ACS recommends that you discuss any new findings or problems in your breasts with your doctor. Additionally, inform your doctor of any prior surgeries, hormone use and family or personal history of breast cancer.

How To Schedule Your Mammogram

Contact our central scheduling service at (703) 578-2034 or the Imaging Department at (703) 578-2280 to schedule a time and day convenient for you.

Note: Please do not schedule your mammogram for the week before your menstrual cycle if your breasts are usually tender during this time. The best time to schedule your mammogram is one week following your menstrual cycle.

What To Expect When You Arrive

The Imaging Department at NVCH offers a convenient means of obtaining your mammogram, with state-of-the-art mammography services in a comfortable, pleasant atmosphere. NVCH offers free parking and easy access. Our facility consistently receives excellent ratings from patients.

How To Prepare For The Procedure

On the day of the procedure:

- Do not wear deodorant, talcum powder or lotion under your arms or on your breasts. These can appear on the x-ray film as calcifications.
- Always inform your doctor or x-ray technologist if there is any possibility that you are pregnant.
- Describe any breast symptoms or problems to the technologist performing the exam.
- Obtain prior mammograms and make them available to the Radiologist.

How The Procedure Is Performed

During a mammogram, the Radiology Technologist will position you to image your breast. The breast is placed on a special platform and compressed with a paddle (often made of clear Plexiglas or other plastic). Most patients are nervous or apprehensive about having their breast compressed, however, breast compression is necessary in order to:



- Even out the breast thickness so all of the tissue can be visualized;
- Spread out the tissue so that small abnormalities won't be obscured by overlying breast tissue;
- Allow the use of a lower x-ray dose since a thinner amount of breast tissue is being imaged;
- Hold the breast still in order to eliminate blurring of

- the image caused by motion;
- Reduce x-ray scatter to increase sharpness of the picture.

You will be asked to change positions slightly between images. The routine views are a top-to-bottom view and a side view. The process is then repeated for the other breast. The examination process should take about half an hour.

What You Will Experience During The Procedure

You will feel pressure on the breast as the compressor squeezes it. Some women with sensitive breasts may experience discomfort. If this is the case, schedule the procedure when your breasts are least tender.



Remember to relax. Our staff is dedicated to making your mammogram as quick and comfortable as possible. If you have questions or concerns, please notify us immediately.

What To Do Next

When the mammogram is completed you will be asked to wait until the technologist examines the images to determine if more pictures are needed.

Ask when your results will be available; **DO NOT** assume the results are normal if you do not hear from your doctor or the mammography facility.

If you have any further questions please call the Imaging Department at 703-578-2280.

Did You Know?

- After skin cancer, breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in women in the US.
- Breast Cancer is second only to lung cancer in cancer-related deaths.
- In 2001, an estimated 192,200 women were diagnosed with breast cancer and 40,600 women died from the disease.