

# Healthy People



October is Breast  
Cancer Awareness  
Month

## 7 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GETTING A MAMMOGRAM

A mammogram is an important step in taking care of yourself and your breasts. Knowing what to expect may help you navigate the process more smoothly. So here's what you need to know before you go.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the United States (other than skin cancer). But millions of women are surviving the disease thanks in part to early detection and improvements in treatment.

### Signs and symptoms of breast cancer

Widespread use of screening mammograms has increased the number of breast cancers found before they cause any symptoms. Still some breast cancers are not found by mammograms, either because the test was not done or because even under ideal conditions mammograms do not find every breast cancer.

### Breast lump or mass

The most common symptom of breast cancer is a new lump or mass. A mass that's painless, hard, and has irregular edges is more likely to be cancer, but breast cancers can be tender, soft, or rounded. They can even be painful. For this reason, it's important to have any new breast mass, lump, or change checked by a health care provider experienced in diagnosing breast diseases.

### Other possible symptoms of breast cancer include:

- Swelling of all or part of a breast (even if no distinct lump is felt)
- Skin irritation or dimpling
- Breast or nipple pain
- Nipple retraction (turning inward)
- Redness, scaliness, or thickening of the nipple or breast skin
- A nipple discharge other than breast milk
- Sometimes breast cancer can spread to lymph nodes under the arm or around the collar bone and cause a lump or swelling there, even before the original tumor in the breast tissue is large enough to be felt.

Although any of these symptoms can be caused by things other than breast cancer, if you have them, see your health care provider so that he or she can find the cause. 1.800.884.0287 | [www.healthscopebenefits.com](http://www.healthscopebenefits.com)

- A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast that is used to find breast changes. Today's x-rays machines used for mammograms produces lower energy x-rays and expose the breast to much less radiation than those in the past.
- Find a center that specializes in mammograms. When you find a facility that you like, stick with it. Having all of your mammograms at the same facility will make it easier for the doctors to compare images from one year to the next.
- It is best to schedule your mammogram about a week after your menstrual period. Your breasts won't be as tender or swollen, which means less discomfort during the x-ray.
- Wear a 2-piece outfit because you will need to remove your top and bra. Do not apply deodorant, antiperspirant, powder, lotion, or ointment on or around your chest on the day of your mammogram. These products can appear as tiny white spots on the x-ray.
- The entire procedure takes about 20 minutes. The breast is compressed between two plastic plates for a few seconds while an x-ray is taken. It is repositioned and compressed again to take another view. This is then on the other breast too. Flattening the breast can be uncomfortable, but is needed to provide a clearer view.
- You should get your results within 30 days. If you don't, you should call about them. If doctors find something suspicious, you will likely be contacted within a week to take new pictures or to get other tests. But that doesn't mean you have cancer. A suspicious finding may be just dense breast tissue or a cyst. Other times, the image just isn't clear and need to be retaken.
- Under the Affordable Health Care Act, Medicare and almost all primate insurance plan now cover yearly mammograms, with no co-pay or other out-of-pocket costs. Medicare also covers mammograms.

