

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray image of the breast. Today, mammograms are digital images.

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, but it can help rule out cancer. Other imaging tests may be done after a diagnostic mammogram if cancer can't be ruled out. If the findings suggest breast cancer, a **biopsy** will be needed to diagnose (or rule out) breast cancer.

Digital breast tomosynthesis (DBT, tomo, 3D mammography)

Today, most women have mammography with digital breast tomosynthesis (DBT). DBT can also be called "tomo" or 3D mammography. DBT takes multiple 2D digital images of the breast. Computer software combines 2D images to create a 3D image. DBT takes a few seconds longer than a 2D digital mammogram because more images are taken.

Both DBT and 2D mammography are effective in finding breast cancer early. However, some studies have shown DBT may find a few more breast cancers than 2D digital mammography.



What to expect on the day of the mammogram

A screening mammogram takes about 15 minutes.

- Wear a shirt you can remove easily since you'll undress from the waist up before the mammogram.
- 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 or the mammography center.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)
komen.org

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](#)
- [Questions to Ask Your Doctor – Screening Mammograms](#)
- [What is Breast Cancer](#)



Questions & answers about mammography

When should I get a screening mammogram?

Talk with your doctor about when and how often to get a screening mammogram. Susan G. Komen® believes all women should have access to regular screening mammograms when they and their doctor 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 from a mammogram harmful?

You're exposed to a small amount of radiation during a mammogram. Although this exposure might increase the risk of breast cancer over time, this increase is very small. Studies show the benefits of mammography outweigh this risk, especially for women ages 50 and older.

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

There are no special screening recommendations for women with dense breasts. However, your doctor may suggest other types of breast imaging in addition to regular mammograms.

What if I can't afford a mammogram?

The [Affordable Care Act](#) requires most health insurance plans to cover screening mammograms every 1-2 years for women 40 and older. This includes Medicare and Medicaid. Call the Komen Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) or email at helpline@komen.org for information about low-cost programs in your area.

The Helpline will also see if you're eligible for Komen's Screening & Diagnostics Program, which provides no-cost breast cancer screening and diagnostic services for those who meet income guidelines in certain areas.

This content provided by Susan G. Komen® is designed for educational purposes only and is not exhaustive. Please consult with your personal physician.