



*St. Luke's
Hospital*

A Sutter Health Affiliate

With You. For Life.

The Breast Health Center

What You Should Know about Mammograms

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an x-ray of the breasts. Physicians use mammograms to detect cancers and other problems in the breast that they cannot feel or to further investigate lumps they can feel. The mammogram is performed by a certified technologist and interpreted by a radiologist (a doctor specialized in looking at x-rays). Modern mammograms deliver a low-dose of radiation to each breast. Your doctor may order one of two different types of mammograms. One is called a screening mammogram and the other is called a diagnostic mammogram.

A screening mammogram is used for women who have no specific breast symptoms. It involves taking two pictures of each breast.

A diagnostic mammogram is for women who have concerns of a new lump, new nipple discharge, or other breast concerns that need evaluation. A diagnostic mammogram usually involves taking a couple of extra mammograms so that the area of concern can be magnified.

Why should a woman get a mammogram?

Mammograms have been shown to detect breast cancers that are too small to be felt. They have also been shown to slightly decrease a woman's chance of dying from breast cancer. For these reasons, health care agencies and physicians recommend getting routine mammograms.

What women should get mammograms?

This remains controversial. The American Cancer Society, The American College of Radiology, and the National Cancer Institute all recommend that women begin having yearly mammograms at age 40 and continue lifelong while they remain healthy. Other agencies like the United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends mammograms every 1-2 years starting at age 40 until age 69. If you are at high risk for breast cancer you should consult your physician or your breast care specialist for a personal mammography plan.

What can I expect the day I get a mammogram?

A gown will be provided to you for your privacy, but we also recommend that you wear a two-piece outfit since the procedure involves removing the top half of your clothing. Additionally, we ask that you not wear talcum powder or deodorant as these products can alter the quality of the mammogram. The mammogram procedure requires compression of the breast between two x-ray paddles. This can cause a small amount of discomfort but is not usually painful. The whole procedure takes approximately hour.

When will I know the results of my mammogram?

If you get a screening mammogram your doctor will have a report within 3-4 days. A report is mailed to you within 10 days. If there is any additional mammography needed, it is the policy of the The Breast Health Center at St. Luke's to contact the patient by phone within 2-3 days.

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