



*St. Luke's  
Hospital*

A Sutter Health Affiliate

*With You. For Life.*

# The Breast Health Center

## **What You Should Know about Ultrasound**

### *What is an ultrasound?*

Ultrasound is a technology that uses sound waves to generate pictures of tissues. Ultrasound is often used to look for abnormalities in the breast tissue. Sound waves are generated by a hand-held probe that is held against the breast. The waves travel into the breast and as they hit different types of tissue some of the sound waves bounce back, giving the radiologist a “picture” of what’s inside. There is no radiation involved, and the procedure is not painful.

### *Why would I get an ultrasound?*

Ultrasound is particularly good at differentiating between solid and cystic nodules in the breast. For instance, if a woman feels a lump in her breast an ultrasound is used to tell if the lump is a cyst (fluid-filled) or a solid nodule. Ultrasound can also give the radiologist important information about the shape and size as well as other characteristics of the lump. The radiologist can then make a determination of how suspicious the lump is or whether a biopsy is needed.

### *Should I get an ultrasound instead of a mammogram?*

Mammography is recommended for yearly screening for breast cancer in women over the age of 40. Ultrasound, on the other hand, is used when a lump or an area of concern is felt or when an abnormality is seen on mammogram. Ultrasound is not routinely used for yearly screening for breast cancer.

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