



PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

ONCOLOGY

Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines

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WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BREAST CANCER?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women. More than 2 million new breast cancer diagnoses are given each year. In the United States, breast cancer comprises 29% of all cancer diagnoses. This equates to one in eight women in the United States with a diagnosis of breast cancer in their lifetime. Breast cancer incidence and death rates have increased over the last several decades due to changes in risk factors, better cancer registration, and better detection methodologies. However, mammogram screening has reduced breast cancer mortality by nearly 40% since 1990.

WHAT IS A MAMMOGRAM AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast. You will stand in front of an X-ray machine and place your breasts on a plate. Another plate will firmly press down on the top of your breast to obtain the X-ray image. This process will be repeated on each breast. A mammogram can be used for both screening and diagnostic purposes. The goal of screening mammograms is to detect breast cancer in its early stages, prior to symptom onset, leading to better treatment outcomes. Diagnostic mammograms use the same technology to achieve a more detailed image but are done in men or women with an abnormal screening mammogram or symptoms, such as:

- New lumps in your breasts or underarm
- Redness, irritation, dimpling, or warmth of the skin on your breast or nipple area
- Pain in any area of the breast
- Recent changes to your breast size or shape

Since the 1960s, mammography has been widely used as a screening tool for breast cancer in women. This has resulted in a nearly 40% decrease in overall breast cancer mortality since the 1990s.

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WHAT ARE THE SCREENING GUIDELINES?

Two entities offer screening mammogram recommendations in the United States: The United States Preventative Task Force and the American Cancer Society.

United States Preventative Task Force (USPFTF)

- The USPFTF recommends screening every 2 years for women ages 50-74 years.
- The USPFTF does not have specific screening recommendations for women over the age of 75 years. Talk with your doctor about whether mammograms should be a continued part of your health plan.

American Cancer Society (ACS)

- The ACS recommends annual screening for women ages 45-54 years
- The ACS provides the option to begin annual screening mammograms earlier, between the ages of 40-44 years, based on a woman's personal health goals.
- Women age 55 years and older can choose to integrate a mammogram into their health plan every year or every 2 years. Screening should continue if the patient is healthy and has a life expectancy of at least 10 more years.

Talk with your physician about which set of guidelines is right for you, and whether you have certain risk factors that may require you to begin screening earlier. These include obesity, alcohol intake, smoking, processed foods, family history, female sex, older age, and hormone replacement therapy.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS AFTER A MAMMOGRAM?

If your screening mammogram is negative, continue with your screening schedule. Talk with your doctor about monthly self-breast exams. These are encouraged so you can become familiar with your breast architecture.

If your screening mammogram is positive, further testing will be done, and a treatment team may comprise a medical oncologist, surgeon, and radiation oncologist. This team will formulate an appropriate treatment plan for you.