

BREAST HEALTH

RISK FACTORS FOR BREAST CANCER

- Aging- the older you get, the greater your risk of breast cancer.
- A family history of breast cancer.
- Alcohol- having more than one drink per day. (One drink = 12-ounces beer, or 5-ounces wine, or 1.5-ounces hard liquor)
- Being overweight.
- Menstruation before age 12.
- Menopause after age 55.
- Having your first child after age 35.
- Lack of physical activity

BREAST CANCER SCREENING GUIDELINES

A woman's breasts change constantly. They change during the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, breast-feeding, and menopause. These changes can sometimes bring problems.

Most of the problems are insignificant, but a few can be serious. One serious problem is breast cancer. The key to surviving breast cancer is **early detection**.

Recommendations for breast cancer screening are as follows*:

American Cancer Society

Women aged 45 to 54 should get a mammogram every year

Women aged 55 and older should get a mammogram every 2 years

US Preventive Services Task Force

Women aged 50-74 should get a mammogram every 2 years

*Women who are at higher risk should be screened earlier and more frequently

MAMMOGRAM



I. What is a mammogram?

Mammogram is an X-ray examination of the breast. Mammography is used to detect and diagnose breast disease both in women who have breast symptoms such as a lump, pain, or nipple discharge, and women with no symptoms.

II. Why do I need a mammogram?

A woman's risk of developing breast cancer increases as she gets older. Over 3/4 of breast cancers diagnosed each year occur in women over age 50. In many cases, women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of the disease. Some breast cancer often has no symptoms early in the disease. A mammogram can detect cancer in its early stage when it is still too small to be felt. Finding breast cancer early can save your life.

III. Is mammogram safe?

Over the past 20 years, mammography techniques and equipment have improved a great deal, and today the level of radiation is very low and not harmful.

IV. What is it like to get a mammogram?

When you get a mammogram, you stand beside the machine, and a specially trained technologist places your breast on a plastic plate.

A second piece of plastic is placed on top and for a few seconds, some pressure is applied to flatten the breast and get a good, clear picture. This compression process only takes a couple of seconds. Two pictures usually are taken of each breast. Some women may feel a little discomfort, but most report none. The entire mammography exam takes about 15 minutes. A specialist, called radiologist, will read the mammogram to see if any suspicious areas exist.

If you have sensitive breasts, try having your mammogram at a time of the month when your breasts will be least tender. Try to avoid the week right before your period. This will help to lessen discomfort.

Don't wear deodorant, powder, or cream, under your arms - it may interfere with the quality of the mammogram. It's a good idea to wear a blouse with a skirt or slacks, rather than a dress, since you will have to undress above the waist. Mammogram may still be performed if a patient has breast implants as long as the technician is notified.

V. What happens if they find something?

If a mass is found, the doctor will perform a biopsy, which involves taking out part or all of the suspicious tissue. It is then examined under a microscope by a specialist called a pathologist. A biopsy is the only sure way to know if cancer is present. It's important to remember that even if you are told you need a biopsy, more than 80% of lumps or suspicious areas are not cancer.

If the biopsy shows that there is cancer, the woman and her doctor will discuss treatment options.

Early cancer often can be treated by removing the lump or a portion of the breast rather than the whole breast.

VI. Tips for having a mammogram

- Before going to a mammogram facility, write down any pertinent medical history such as prior surgeries, hormone use, and family or personal history of breast cancer.
- If you are going to a facility for the first time, bring a list of the places, dates of mammograms, biopsies, or other breast treatments you have had before.
- Discuss any new findings or problems in your breasts with your doctor or nurse before having a mammogram.
- Always describe any breast symptoms or problems that you are having to the technologist who is doing the mammogram.
- Follow-up with your doctor or facility if you haven't heard from your doctor within 10 days. All mammogram facilities are now required to send your results to you within 30 days.

VII. How can I get a mammogram?

Mammograms are covered by Medicare, MediCal, and most private health insurance plans. Many public health departments, hospitals, and clinics may also offer low-cost or free mammograms. In California, women may also receive free mammograms through the Cancer Detection Programs: Every Woman Counts (CDPEWC). For help in finding a place to get a quality mammogram, call the Chinese Community Health Resource Center at (1-415) 677-2473.