

# Mammography

## Patient Information

### What is diagnostic mammography?

A diagnostic mammogram is an X-ray examination of the breasts. This is performed when signs or symptoms are discovered in one or both breasts,

- a lump,
- tenderness,
- nipple discharge or
- skin changes.

The mammogram helps confirm whether the changes are benign (non-cancerous) and no treatment is needed, or whether the changes may indicate breast cancer, and require further tests and treatment

### How do I prepare for diagnostic mammography?

If you have menstrual or monthly periods it is best to have your diagnostic mammogram one week after the start of your period. The breasts will not be as tender at this time, and you will be more comfortable when the breasts are placed between two plates to take the X-ray images.

If you have breast implants, please let us know so we can schedule a longer appointment. This is because with the presence of implants, additional images are required to visualise all the breast tissue.

Don't wear any perfume, lotion or talcum powder on the day of your appointment because these substances may show up as shadows on your mammogram. Wear a two-piece outfit so you only need to undress from the waist up. Bring any previous mammograms with you to your appointment so they can be compared with the diagnostic mammogram.

### What happens during diagnostic mammography?

A radiographer will explain the mammography procedure to you and ask a few questions around prior mammograms, family history of breast disease and previous breast issues and surgeries. Your breasts will then be put, one at a time, between two special plates and slightly compressed (pressed down) between the plates by the X-ray machine for a few seconds while the mammogram is taken.

Two views of each breast are performed as a minimum.

A specially trained radiographer performs the mammographic examination. While the compression may be uncomfortable it lasts only seconds. Without compression, the X-rays would be blurry which makes it hard to see any abnormality. Compression also reduces the amount of radiation required for the mammogram.



### Are there any after effects of diagnostic mammography?

After effects are rare, although you may experience breast tenderness. If your skin is fragile you may rarely experience bruising, or splitting of the skin.

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### How long does diagnostic mammography take?

Standard Diagnostic Mammography takes between 10 -15 minutes, while the breast compression component takes less than a minute. Sometimes extra views are performed which take longer. If you have breast implants, the mammography will take longer (approximately 30 minutes) because it takes more time to obtain additional images.

### What are the risks of diagnostic mammography?

Like all X-rays, having a mammogram exposes you to some radiation, but only a very small amount. Such risk is far outweighed by the benefit of early detection of breast cancer, significantly reducing the death rate from the disease.

The risk of developing cancer from a mammogram is no greater than developing cancer from exposure to the natural background radiation accumulated from the normal environment in less than one year.

If you have breast implants there is an extremely small risk of damage to the implant.

It is important to note that mammography does not detect all breast cancers, even when the cancer has caused a lump that can be felt. In such a circumstance, a normal mammogram does not mean that the lump can be ignored. In this situation, other diagnostic tests such as breast ultrasound and needle biopsy may be necessary to find out the cause of the lump.

### What are the benefits of diagnostic mammography?

The benefits of mammography far outweigh the risk.

Multiple scientific studies have provided plenty of evidence that early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer can save lives. Early detection increases the likelihood of a cancer being successfully treated and often allows for greater treatment options.

### Who does the diagnostic mammography?

The X-rays are taken by a radiographer who has received specialist training in the field of mammography. Mammograms are then read and interpreted by a radiologist (a specialist doctor with training in breast imaging), who will provide your referring doctor with a report of the examination.

### How do I get my results?

Your doctor will receive a written report on your test as soon as is practicable.

It is very important that you discuss the results with the doctor whom referred you so that they can explain what the results mean for you.

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