



## Your mammogram guide

Annual mammograms are one of the best tools doctors have to find breast cancer early. Even so, getting your mammogram can be scary. Knowing how to prepare for and what to expect from this important screening can eliminate some of that fear.

## What happens during the mammogram

The entire mammogram procedure takes about 30 minutes. Standing in front of a special X-ray machine, the technologist will place your breast on a plastic plate. Another plate will firmly press your breast from above. The plates will flatten the breast, holding it still while the X-ray is being taken. Each breast will be compressed for 20 to 30 seconds. While compression can be uncomfortable, it's important because it allows the breast tissue to spread and flatten. This provides a clear view of the entire breast and reduces the amount of radiation needed to make an image.



## Is the procedure painful?

Having a mammogram is uncomfortable for some. It may feel slightly painful depending on your personal pain tolerance. The key is to remember a mammogram takes only a few moments, so the discomfort is brief.

## Preparing for your mammogram

Try not to have your mammogram the week before you get your menstrual period or during your period when your breasts may be tender or swollen. It's best to schedule your mammogram for the week following your period when your breasts are the least tender. On the day of your mammogram, don't wear deodorant, lotion or powder. These products can show up as white spots on the X-ray. You will need to undress from your waist up for the mammogram,

so consider wearing a two-piece outfit so you only have to remove your top. The technologist performing your mammogram will give you a gown to wear.

## The results of the mammogram

You will usually get the results within a few days. A radiologist reads your mammogram and then sends the results to your doctor or other health care provider. You will receive a letter in the mail with results, which can also be accessed via MyChart. Contact your health care provider or the mammography facility if you do not receive a report of your results within a week.

## Topics to discuss with the technologist

Before the exam, let your technologist know if you are anxious or have any concerns. It's OK to ask questions and communicate with your technologist. Below are a few questions and topics you might want to discuss.

- How long will the mammogram take?
- When and how will I get my results?
- Let your technologist know if you have breast implants. Getting a mammogram with breast implants is not an issue, but it changes how the technologist takes the images.
- If you are in pain during the procedure, say so and ask if anything can be done. The technologist may be able to reposition you in a more comfortable way. Most technologists have done so many mammograms that they're experts at making the procedure as comfortable as possible.

## After the mammogram

**If your mammogram is normal:** Continue to get regular mammograms as your provider recommends. Mammograms work best when they can be compared with previous screenings. This allows the radiologist to look for changes in your breasts.

**If your mammogram is abnormal:** An abnormal mammogram does not always mean there's cancer. Keep in mind that suspicious findings usually aren't cancer. They may be cysts, dense tissue or the result of an unclear image. Many women have an unusual finding on their first mammogram because there is no previous image for comparison. Your provider will most likely order additional mammograms, tests or exams to investigate further.



## It's okay to be nervous

Many people get nervous about their annual mammogram. It's normal to feel anxious when having a test that screens for cancer. The important thing is to acknowledge the anxiety but remember the bigger picture: This test can be lifesaving.

**If you are due for a mammogram, visit [multicare.org/mammogram](https://www.multicare.org/mammogram) to schedule an appointment near you.**

### Sources:

[https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic\\_info/mammograms.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/mammograms.htm)

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<https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/mammogram/about/pac-20384806>

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