



Diagnostic Mammography

Patient Information

What is Diagnostic Mammography?

A diagnostic mammogram is an X-ray examination of the breasts. This is performed when unusual signs or symptoms are discovered in one or both breasts, i.e. a lump, tenderness, nipple discharge or skin changes. The mammogram confirms whether the changes are benign (non-cancerous) and no treatment is needed, or whether the changes indicate breast cancer, with further tests and treatment required.

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 not feel as much discomfort or pain for the few seconds when the breasts are pressed between two plates to take the X-ray images.

If you have breast implants, please let us know so they can schedule a longer appointment. This is because with the presence of implants, it takes more time to make sure clear images are taken.

Don't wear any deodorant, 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?

When you have undressed, a radiographer will explain the mammography procedure to you and ask a few questions around prior mammograms, family history of breast disease etc. Your breasts will then be put, one at a time, between two special plates and compressed (pressed down) between the plates by the X-ray machine for a few seconds while X-rays are taken.

Two views of each breast are performed as a minimum.

The mammography and the compression are performed by a specially trained radiographer. While the compression may be uncomfortable and perhaps painful 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, but you may experience breast tenderness, bruising, or splitting of the skin if your skin is fragile.

How long does Diagnostic Mammography take?

Standard Diagnostic Mammography takes between 10-15 minutes. 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 make sure clear images are taken.

What are the risks of Diagnostic Mammography?

Like all X-rays, having a mammogram exposes you to some radiation, but only a 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 1 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.

This information is credited to Inside Radiology, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiology (RANZCR).

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June 2014