

PATIENT INFORMATION



FROM
YOUR DOCTOR

Why mammograms are important



The facts

- Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in women in the United States.
- Most breast cancer occurs in women who have no risk factors other than their age.
- The older you get, the greater your chance of having breast cancer (see the graph below).
- If your mother or sister has had breast cancer, your risk of having it is higher than average.
- If breast cancer is detected early enough, it can be treated successfully.

What you can do about it

- The best way to find out if you have breast cancer is to have regular examinations by your doctor and regular mammograms. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast.
- A mammogram can help find a breast cancer before you or your doctor is able to feel it.
- Breast cancer found by a mammogram is less likely to have spread to other parts of your body.
- Many insurance programs cover

the cost of mammograms. Medicare, for example, pays for a mammogram every other year after age 65.

How often?

How often should you have a mammogram? Here's what most experts say:

- For women with a high risk of breast cancer, including those with a family history of breast cancer: every year.
- For women in their 40s: every 1-2 years.
- For women in their 50s and 60s: every year.
- For women over 70: regularly, depending on your general health and your risk factors for breast cancer.

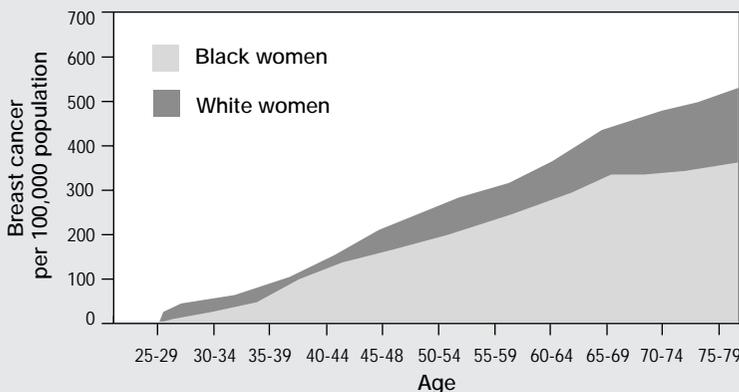
Is it painful?

There is some discomfort—the breast is compressed between two plastic plates while the X-rays are taken. Some women will feel more discomfort than others. But it will usually be less bothersome if you have a mammogram done a few days after your menstrual period begins. That's when your breasts are least tender.

What else can I do?

- It's important that your doctor do a breast examination regularly. The best time to do this is at regularly scheduled checkups. You should certainly have a breast exam every year after age 40, and at least every three years before that.
- You can help by examining your own breasts regularly and letting your physician know if anything feels different. Let your doctor know if you feel persistent pain in the breast, have irritated skin, tenderness of the nipple, or any discharge from the nipple.

Age increases your risk of breast cancer



Source: SEER: Cancer Statistics Review 1973-90



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