

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BREAST CANCER SCREENING AND PREVENTION

What Is Breast Cancer Screening?

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer in women but is rare in men. Breast cancer screening is used to find cancer before you have symptoms. A mammogram is the screening test most often used to find breast cancer. It uses X-rays to check for cancer or other abnormal growths in the breast. In some cases, other tests also may be used.

Am I at Risk?

Breast cancer risk increases with many risk factors, including:

- Family history of breast cancer
- Older age
- History of breast disease
- Increased breast density
- Younger age when you got your first period
- History of chest irradiation to treat cancer

Talk with your health care professional about your personal risk for breast cancer.

When Should I Be Screened?

Most women aged 50–74 years, who are in good health, should have a mammogram once every 2 years. Women aged 40–49 years may also benefit from screening and should discuss with their doctor whether having a mammogram is right for them. Women older than 75 should also discuss with their doctor the benefits and harms of screening.

Your health care professional can help you decide when and how often you should be screened. If you notice any changes in your breasts, you should speak with your health care professional. Some things to consider when you are making the choice to be screened are:

- Your personal risk for breast cancer
- Your age
- Your personal values for screening and for the harms of screening

What Are the Possible Harms of Screening?

Screening for breast cancer lowers your risk for dying of breast cancer. However, it can also cause some harms, such as:



- Show false-positive results. These are results that show cancer when it does not exist.
- Lead to more testing that is not needed. This happens often if you have false-positive results.
- Find tumors that don't need to be treated because they don't progress.
- Cause anxiety and distress.
- Be expensive, depending on your insurance benefits.

How Can I Lower My Risk?

- Healthy habits reduce your risk for breast cancer. These habits include more exercise, healthy diets, and limited alcohol use.
- If you have a family history of breast cancer, you may want to be tested for the breast cancer gene. This test uses a blood sample.
- If you are positive for the breast cancer gene, your health care provider may recommend medication or surgery to help prevent breast cancer.

Questions for My Doctor

- What is my personal risk for breast cancer?
- How often should I be screened?
- Should I be tested for the breast cancer gene?
- What harms from testing should I consider?

For More Information



American College of Physicians
Leading Internal Medicine, Improving Lives

MedlinePlus

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/breastcancer.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/screening.htm

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org/healthy/findcancerearly/examandtestdescriptions/mammogramsandotherbreastimagingprocedures/mammograms-and-other-breast-imaging-procedures-toc