

Mammograms

How are mammograms performed?

- Mammograms use a small and safe amount of radiation to take pictures of your breasts.
- Your mammogram will be performed by a female technologist in a private room. You will undress from the waist up and wear a small gown.
- The technologist will place each breast on a platform and a clear plastic plate will compress each of your breasts side-to-side and then top-to-bottom.
- The compression is not comfortable, but lasts only two to three seconds and should not be painful.
- Compression allows the mammogram to use less radiation and is important because a cancer can be seen better.
- You and the technologists are a team and will work together to get the best pictures. The technologist may need to repeat pictures to make sure all parts of your breasts are seen on the pictures.

How do you prepare for a mammogram?

- Bring your prior mammograms and reports to your appointment if they were done elsewhere.
- Bring your medical history with you, such as family history of breast cancer or prior biopsies and surgeries.
- Do not wear deodorant, lotions, or powders on your underarms or breasts.
- Relaxing your muscles and focusing on your breathing during the mammogram can help reduce discomfort and fear.
- If ok'd by your clinician, an over the counter ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) an hour before your mammogram can help with discomfort.
- A mammogram during the first two weeks of your menstrual cycle when you breasts are less tender may feel better.

What are the types of mammograms?

- Both screening and diagnostic mammograms try to find breast cancer early.
- A **screening study** takes pictures of your breasts when you are not having any symptoms and can find a cancer years before you can feel a lump.
- A **diagnostic study** uses mammograms and may also include an ultrasound. Each patients needs are different. The doctor will look at the pictures decide if you may need more testing.

Screening Mammograms

Who should get one?

- Breast doctors and most health organizations recommend a screening mammogram for most women starting at age 40.
- Your breast doctors recommend a mammogram every year because it saves the most lives by finding breast cancer early when it is most treatable.
- Depending on your family history of breast cancer and other personal medical history, a screening mammogram earlier than age 40 or a breast MRI may be recommended. Talk with your clinician to make the best plan for you.

How long do they take?

- Screening mammograms usually take 20 minutes and you can leave the clinic as soon as the pictures are taken.

When do I get my results?

- Results from your screening mammogram should be available within one to three days, but can take up to 2 weeks if your prior mammograms are from a different hospital.
- You can use the MyChart app or logon (<https://myuncchart.org/MyChart/>). You will receive a letter in the mail in about a week if you have not viewed your results on MyChart.

Diagnostic Mammograms and Ultrasounds

Who gets a diagnostic study?

You will be recommended for a diagnostic study if:

- The doctor sees something on the screening mammogram or screening MRI and wants more pictures. This is a “call back.”
- Or if your clinician feels something in your breast during your office exam.
- Or for patients who feel a lump, see skin or nipple changes, or have nipple discharge.
- Or if the doctor has been watching something on your prior mammograms.

How long does it take to get a diagnostic study?

- From start to finish, the diagnostic study will take longer than the screening study. Depending on many factors, you may be in the department up to 2 hours. The breast imaging doctor will look at your pictures while you wait.

- Depending on what the breast imaging doctor sees, they may recommend taking more mammograms to look at a part of your breast better.
- Depending on what the breast imaging doctor sees, they may also recommend you get an ultrasound after your mammogram to look at a part of your breast closer.
- Each patients needs are different. The doctor will look at your diagnostic pictures very closely and your will get your results at the end of the study.
- There is also the possibility that the doctor will recommend that you return to the clinic on another day for a small procedure to take a sample of breast tissue to provide more information. This is called a “breast biopsy.” Please see “Breast Biopsy” sheet for more details about this procedure.

Questions?

The UNC Mammography Clinic can be reached at (984)-974-8762 if you have any questions.