

Your First Mammogram

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There's a good reason 25 million mammograms, or low-dose x-ray images of the breast, are performed annually. Mammography is the best way of finding breast cancer during its early, more treatable stages. The American Cancer Society recommends that women have a baseline screening mammogram between the ages of 35 and 40 and receive annual mammograms beginning at age 40.

Before the Examination

Try to schedule your mammogram for the week following your menstrual period, when your breasts are less tender. Wear a two-piece outfit to the examination, so you only will have to remove your top. Don't

apply underarm deodorant, powders, ointments or creams to your chest area the day of the exam because these products can show up on the x-ray images and make them difficult to interpret. Be sure to bring the name, address and phone number of the physician who referred you for the mammogram. Before the examination, you will be asked to undress from the waist up and

put on an examination gown. A mammographer will perform your examination. Mammographers are skilled medical professionals who have received specialized education in the areas of mammographic positioning and techniques.

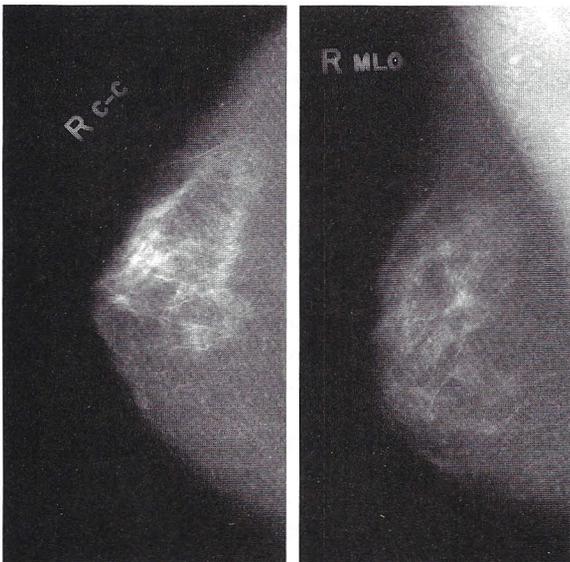
During the Examination

The mammographer will ask you to stand in front of the mammography unit, a special type of x-ray machine. She will

place one of your breasts on a small platform attached to the machine. The platform can be raised or lowered to match your height. Your breast then will be gradually compressed between two clear plastic plates. For screening mammography, two images are taken of the breast, one from the top and one from the side. The examination then is repeated for the other breast. Compression spreads and flattens the breast tissue. It is needed to ensure a clear picture and to reduce the amount of radiation necessary for the x-ray image. Compression may be uncomfortable, but it shouldn't hurt. Let the mammographer know if the compression is painful, and she will try to reposition you to minimize discomfort. Actual compression time is only a few seconds. If you are worried about discomfort, tell your physician. You may be advised to take a mild over-the-counter pain reliever about an hour before your examination. You will be asked to wait a few minutes while the x-ray films are processed. The mammographer then will determine if the images are technically acceptable or if additional views are necessary. Don't be alarmed if you are asked to return for additional images.

After the Examination

The mammography films will be given to a radiologist, a physician who specializes in the diagnostic interpretation of medical images. Under federal regulations, the radiologist must be experienced in reading mammographic images. The radiologist will send your personal physician a report of the findings, and you will receive a written summary of the report in lay terms. If you have not received your results within one month, contact your physician or the mammography facility. Be sure to note the date and facility that performed your mammogram because that information may be necessary for future examinations. ♦



Screening mammograms showing the breasts viewed from the top (left image) and the side (right image).



For more information, contact the American Society of Radiologic Technologists, 15000 Central Ave. SE, Albuquerque, NM 87123-3917, or visit us online at www.asrt.org.