What is screening?

Screening is a test used to find a condition (such as breast cancer) in a person without symptoms.

Breast cancer screening tests

**Mammogram** — Mammography is the best screening tool used today to find breast cancer.

• It can find breast cancer at an early stage, before it can be felt.

• Uses X-rays to create an image of the breast called a mammogram.

Mammograms:

• are stored on a computer (digital mammography).

• can find breast cancer early when it is small and the chances of survival are highest.

**Clinical breast exam (CBE)** — A CBE is done by a doctor who checks your breasts and underarm areas for any lumps or changes. It should be part of your regular medical checkup. If it is not, ask for it.

As new screening tools are developed and we learn more about risk, we may learn who will benefit most from any given screening test. Today, there are screening guidelines for those at average risk and different guidelines for those at higher risk. Women should discuss their risk of breast cancer and their screening options with a doctor.

Know what is normal for you

The signs of breast cancer are not the same for all women. It is important to know how your breasts normally look and feel. Many women find their breasts feel lumpy. Breast tissue often has a bumpy texture that varies from one woman to another. For some, the lumpiness is more obvious than for others. In most cases, this is no cause to worry. If the lumpiness can be felt throughout the breast and feels like your other breast, it is likely just normal breast tissue.

Lumps that feel harder or different from the rest of the breast tissue (or the tissue of the other breast) or that feel like a change are a concern. If you feel or see any change in your breasts or underarms, see a doctor.

Early detection

Even if you feel healthy now, just being a woman and getting older puts you at risk of breast cancer. Finding breast cancer early may save your life.
Questions to ask

Talk with a doctor about your risk of breast cancer. Ask which screening tests are right for you.

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

1. When should I start getting mammograms?
2. If you are 40 and older and your doctor does not recommend a mammogram: Would I benefit from getting a mammogram? What are the risks and benefits of mammography for me?
3. How often should I get a mammogram?
4. Where can I get a mammogram?
5. What if I cannot afford a mammogram?
6. How often do I need a clinical breast exam?
7. Am I at higher risk for breast cancer? Do I need other screening tests?
8. Does my mammogram show that I have dense breasts?

Resources

You can get information about mammograms and clinical breast exams by contacting the organizations listed below.

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345
www.cancer.org

National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Information Service
1-800-4-CANCER
www.cancer.gov

Signs you should not ignore

Be aware of any change in your breast or underarm area. If you notice any of these signs, see a doctor.

- Lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast or underarm area
- Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast
- Change in the size or shape of the breast
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin
- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
- Pulling in of your nipple or other parts of the breast
- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly
- New pain in one spot that does not go away