

1 I've found a lump or change in my breast. Now what?

First, don't panic. Most lumps are not cancer. In younger women, lumps are often related to monthly periods. They often go away on their own by the end of the cycle. But, don't ignore any change in your breast. It is best to see a doctor to have it checked.

2 What will the doctor do?

The doctor will ask about your personal and family medical history, and what you found. Show the doctor exactly where you noticed the lump or other change in your breast. A doctor can tell a lot about a lump from its size, texture and movement within the breast. Benign (not cancer) lumps often feel different from breast cancer. However, the doctor may request tests to learn more about the lump or change.

3 What kind of follow-up tests will I need?

A diagnostic mammogram may be done to learn more about the change you or your doctor noted. It is different from a screening mammogram which is used for routine screening in people with no lumps or changes.



Breast ultrasound uses sound waves to make images of the breast. Breast ultrasound can show the difference between a liquid-filled cyst and a solid mass. It is often used along with a diagnostic mammogram.

Your doctor will decide if one or more of these tests are needed.

4 How is a breast lump treated?

Sometimes an abnormal lump is a liquid-filled sac called a cyst. Doctors can drain cysts by using a very thin needle and removing the fluid. This is called a cyst aspiration, which can be done in a doctor's office or a radiology center. Cysts are almost always benign.

If the cyst does not fully collapse or if the fluid in the cyst contains blood, the cells and fluid may be examined under a microscope. Based on the findings, your doctor may order a diagnostic mammogram, breast ultrasound or biopsy.

5 What about a breast MRI?

Breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) uses magnetic fields to create an image of the breast. It can sometimes find breast cancer not seen on a mammogram.



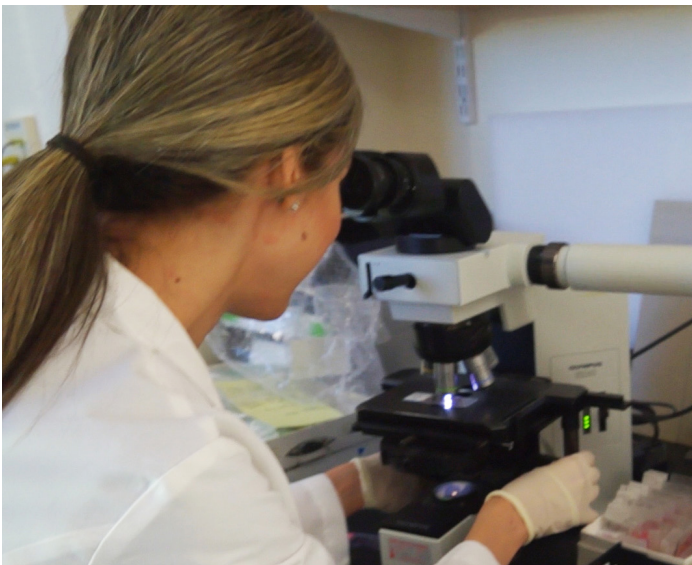
6 What can follow-up tests show?

The results of follow-up tests may show:

- The breast change is not cancer. You can return to your normal screening plan.
- The abnormal finding is probably not cancer. You need to return for another screening in 4-6 months.
- A biopsy is needed to tell whether or not the breast change is cancer.

7 Will I need a biopsy?

If the lump is solid, a biopsy may be needed to remove some cells or a small amount of tissue. The tissue is examined under a microscope to see if it is cancer. Usually, a needle biopsy is done first. It can show whether or not cancer cells are present. If there is a chance the biopsy needle missed the suspicious area or more tissue is needed to check for cancer, a surgical biopsy will be done.

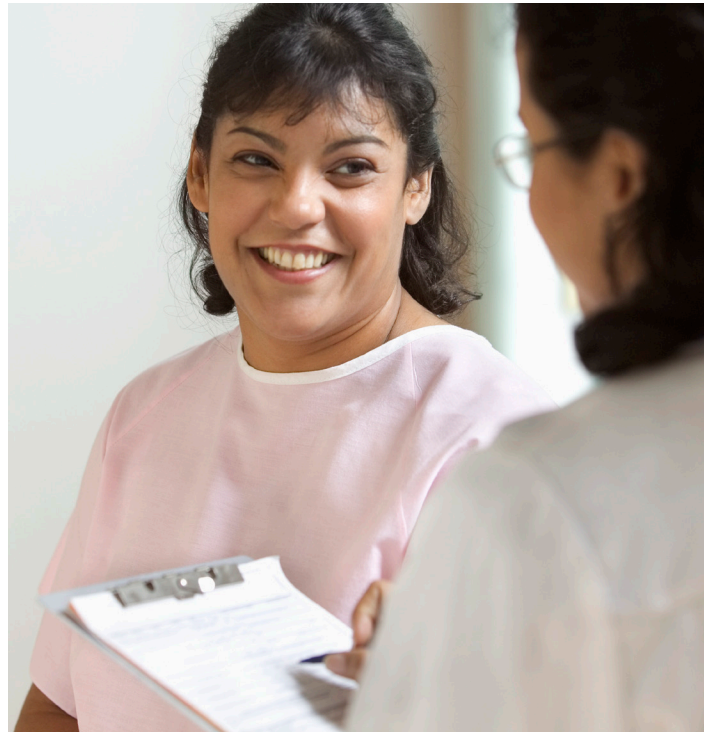


8 What happens next?

If the lump is not cancer, you may have a benign (not cancer) breast condition. Although benign breast conditions are not cancer, some types may increase the risk of breast cancer. Your doctor will talk with you about the breast cancer screening plan that is right for you.

If you have breast cancer, your doctor will talk with you about your treatment options.

If your doctor finds nothing abnormal but you still feel something is wrong, it is a good idea to get a second opinion. Although a lump or change may be nothing to worry about, having it checked by another doctor may give you peace of mind.



Related fact sheets in this series:

- Benign Breast Conditions
- Biopsy
- Breast Cancer Screening and Follow-up Tests

Resources

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
1-800-4-CANCER
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