



# Live Well, Work Well



## WOMEN'S HEALTH: MAMMOGRAMS

Mammography is the best available method to detect breast cancer in its earliest stage, which is approximately one to three years before a woman can feel a lump.

### Get the Facts

Mammography is a specific type of imaging that uses a low-dose X-ray system for examination of the breasts. It allows a radiologist to identify differences between a normal breast and one that may show signs of cancer.

### What to Expect

During a mammogram, you can expect the following:

- You will be required to undress above the waist. The facility will provide a wrap for you to wear.
- A technologist will be present to position your breasts for the mammogram. You and the technologist will be the only persons present during the mammogram. Most technologists are women.
- The entire procedure takes about 20 minutes. The actual breast compression only lasts a few seconds.
- You may feel some discomfort when your breasts are compressed, but you should not feel pain.

### When to Get One

Women in their 20s and 30s should have a clinical breast examination as part of a periodic health exam by a medical professional every three years. After age 40, women should have a breast exam by a health professional every year. The U.S. Preventative Services

Task Force recommends that women ages 50 to 74 should get a mammogram every two years.

The risk of getting breast cancer increases with age, so as long as a woman is in good health, she should continue getting routine mammograms. Young women at high risk for breast cancer should discuss with their doctors if earlier screenings are necessary.

### 2D vs. 3D Mammogram—which should I get?\*

A 3D mammogram (breast tomosynthesis) is an imaging test that combines multiple breast X-rays to create a three-dimensional picture of the breast. 3D mammogram machines create 3D images and standard 2D mammogram images.

Studies show that combining 3D mammograms with standard mammograms reduces the need for additional imaging and slightly increases the number of cancers detected during screening. But more study is needed to understand whether 3D mammograms may reduce the risk of dying of breast cancer more than a standard mammogram alone.

For this reason, most guidelines for breast cancer screening don't specify that women should choose 3D mammograms over standard mammograms alone. Please talk to your provider to determine what type of mammogram is best for you.

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## How to Prepare

- Schedule the test for a time when your breasts are least likely to be tender. If you haven't gone through menopause, that's usually during the week after your menstrual period. Your breasts are most likely to be tender the week before and the week during your period.
- Don't use deodorant before your mammogram. Avoid using deodorants, antiperspirants, powders, lotions, creams or perfumes under your arms or on your breasts. Metallic particles in powders and deodorants can interfere with the imaging.

If you elect to have a 3D mammogram:

- Know your insurance coverage. St. Olaf College's medical plan covers both 2D and 3D mammograms at 100%.
- Choose a facility that offers 3D mammograms. Though 3D mammograms are becoming more common, they aren't available everywhere. If you're interested in this test, ask your doctor whether it's available in your area.
- Bring your prior mammogram images. If you're going to a new facility for your 3D mammogram, gather any prior mammograms and bring them with you to your appointment so that the radiologist can compare them to your new images

## Questions to Ask

The following are suggestions for ensuring you will receive a quality mammogram:

- Ask to see the FDA certificate issued to all facilities that meet high professional standards of safety and quality.
- Use a facility that either specializes in mammography or performs mammograms often.
- Bring a list of the places, dates of mammograms, biopsies, or other breast treatments you may have had before.

