



# Your Breast Health Guide

**You have received this booklet because we care about you.**

By using this booklet and reading about breast health, you will find out:

- What the different types of breast cancer screenings are
- When to perform and schedule screenings for breast cancer
- How to assess your personal risk
- How to prepare for a mammogram
- What resources are available if you are unable to afford these life-saving screenings

## **Why is this important?**

One in eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime. However, early detection and treatment greatly improve an individual's chances of survival. We have created this resource to empower you with the tools and information you need to take charge of your health.



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# Your Breast Health Plan



## **3 Steps to Early Detection**

Early detection means finding the cancer before it spreads. Breast cancer cannot be fully prevented, but early detection provides the greatest possibility of successful treatment. By following these three steps, you will help increase your chance of detecting breast cancer early.

### **1. Breast Self-Awareness**

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Breast self-awareness can help you become familiar with how your breasts normally look and feel. Knowing this will help you identify any changes in your breasts that should be reported to your health care professional promptly. If you find a lump, schedule an appointment with your doctor, but don't panic – most lumps are not cancer.

#### **Changes to look for include:**

- A lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area
- A change in the size or shape of the breast
- Dimpling or puckering in the skin of the breast
- A nipple turned inward into the breast
- Discharge (fluid) from the nipple, especially if bloody or clear in consistency
- Scaly, red, or swollen skin on the breast, nipple, or areola (the dark area of skin at the center of the breast)
- A rash or reddened area of the breast skin, with enlarged pores, giving the appearance of resembling an orange peel

You should see your health care provider about any of these symptoms. With the exception of the last one, these symptoms are often not due to cancer. If you notice any changes in your body, tell your health care provider immediately so that the problems can be diagnosed and if needed, treated.

In the case of finding a lump, your doctor may recommend waiting until you have gone through your next menstrual cycle to see if the lump has gone away on its own. For the other findings mentioned, your doctor will likely see you for a clinical breast exam, as well as breast imaging studies to determine the cause of these symptoms.

## 2. Well-Woman Exam

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It is recommended that women visit their family physician or gynecologist each year for a Well-Woman Exam. In addition to a routine pelvic exam and pap smear, the doctor may perform a clinical breast exam to check for abnormalities.

The Well-Woman Exam is a great opportunity for you to discuss with your health care provider any questions or concerns you have regarding your breast health. For example, your doctor may help you to determine the time and frequency of your breast care exams based on your personal risk. If your doctor doesn't address this, feel free to ask.

## 3. Mammogram

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In its early stages, breast cancer doesn't usually cause symptoms. NBCF recommends that women ages 40 and older get a mammogram every year. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. It is a safe way to detect cancerous tumors and other abnormal breast conditions, and women who have screening mammograms have a lower chance of dying from breast cancer than women who do not have screening mammograms.

Mammograms can detect cancer or other problems before a lump becomes large enough to be detected by touch. They provide an effective way to find breast cancer in its early stages when treatment is usually the most successful. Mammograms are considered safe, quick, and relatively painless.

There have been wonderful improvements in the last 10 years regarding mammogram technology. Today, it is best to get a 3D mammogram also known as tomosynthesis. This type of modern mammogram machine detects breast cancer 28% more accurately than older X-ray analog mammograms.

You can call your mammography facility beforehand to find out if they perform 3D mammography. You may also ask if the radiologist is a breast imaging radiologist. This can also contribute to getting the most accurate reading of your mammogram.

## **Healthy Habits**

Leading a healthy lifestyle is recommended to protect your overall health and may help reduce your risk for certain cancers. Here are a few tips to follow:



- Eat five servings or more of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Limit alcohol intake. Frequent consumption of alcohol can increase your risk for cancer.
- Do not smoke. Or, quit smoking.

## **Scheduling Exams**

While living a healthy life can help reduce your risk for cancer, breast cancer cannot be fully prevented and can occur at any age. Detecting breast cancer at an early stage, when treatment is more likely to be successful still provides the best hope for survival. This is why it is so important for you to schedule regular exams. Below you will find some general guidelines for breast cancer early detection methods. You should always consult with your doctor to create a screening schedule that is most appropriate for you.

<b>EXAM</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Breast Self-Awareness	18+	Regularly/Monthly
Well-Woman Exam	21+	Yearly
Mammogram	40+	Yearly

## Assessing Your Personal Risk

A risk factor is a characteristic that increases the likelihood of developing breast cancer.

I am a woman aged 40 or above:

Yes      No

I have been previously diagnosed with breast cancer or ovarian cancer:

Yes      No

My mother, sister, and/or daughter has been diagnosed with breast cancer:

Yes      No

I have tested positive for a gene mutation that is associated with higher risk of breast cancer (i.e. BRCA1 or BRCA2):

Yes      No

My mother, sister, and/or daughter has tested positive for a gene mutation that is associated with higher risk of breast cancer (i.e. BRCA1 or BRCA2):

Yes      No

I have been diagnosed with dense breast tissue.

Yes      No

I began menstruation before the age of 12.

Yes      No

I began menopause after the age of 55.

Yes      No

I have previously taken or am currently taking a Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

Yes      No

If you answered yes to any of these questions, please talk with your doctor about any concerns you have, including whether genetic testing may be right for you. For more information about the gene mutations that may increase your risk of breast cancer, visit [NBCF.org/breast-cancer-genetics](http://NBCF.org/breast-cancer-genetics)

We also encourage you to explore the National Cancer Institute's Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool available at [Cancer.gov/BCRiskTool](http://Cancer.gov/BCRiskTool)

## Where to Get a Mammogram



Free or low-cost mammograms are available in many parts of the country. Below is information that can help you get a free mammogram if you qualify.

### Who To Talk To

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Many facilities have nurse or patient navigators who will help you obtain and complete the forms you need to receive a free or low-cost mammogram. Even if you do not have documentation, there is help available. A patient navigator can help you understand your options.

### Resources

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#### National Mammography Program

[nbcf.org/national-mammography-program](http://nbcf.org/national-mammography-program)

National Breast Cancer Foundation's National Mammography Program (NMP) provides funding to facilities across the U.S. to provide free or low-cost mammograms for women in need.

#### National Breast & Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program

[cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp](http://cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp)

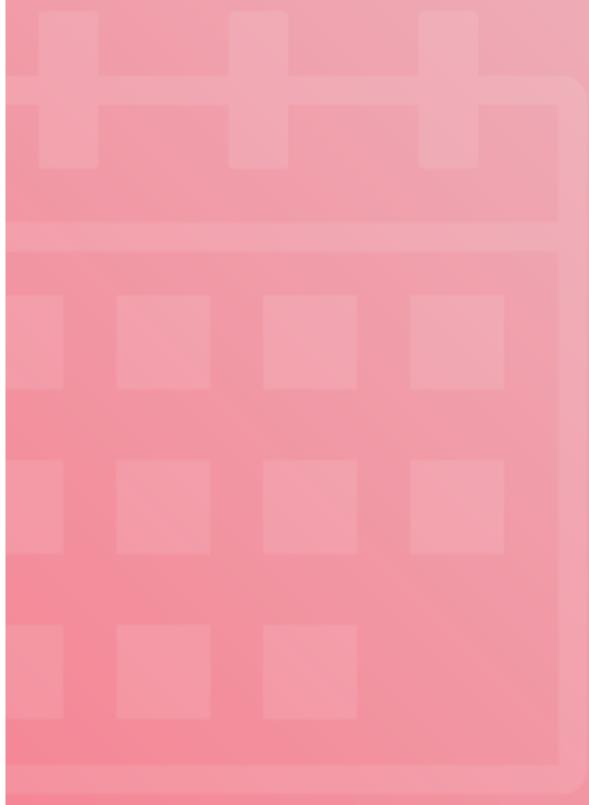
CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) provides access to breast and cervical cancer screening services to women in need in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

#### The National Cancer Institute

[cancer.gov](http://cancer.gov)

The National Cancer Institute can direct you to a local resource for low-cost mammograms. You can call them at 1.800.422.6237. Be sure to have your zip code ready.

# Preparing for Your Appointment



## **Questions to Ask Before a Mammogram**

Before you get a mammogram, you may want to ask your health care provider the following questions:

What should I do to prepare for my mammogram?

Who will receive my mammogram report? Can you send it to my other doctors if needed?

How long will the mammogram take?

Do you have my previous mammogram results?

When will I learn about the results?

Who will notify me of my results?

What happens if the mammogram shows something abnormal?

Will I have to pay anything for a mammogram?

What papers do I need to bring to see if I qualify for a free mammogram?

## Symptom Checklist & Medical History

- Complete this checklist if you have noticed any changes
- in your breasts. This will help you discuss the changes with
- your health care provider.

### I have noticed these breast changes:

A lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area

Left Breast    Right Breast

A change in the size or shape of the breast

Left Breast    Right Breast

Dimpling or puckering in the skin of the breast

Left Breast    Right Breast

A nipple turned inward into the breast

Left Breast    Right Breast

Discharge (fluid) from the nipple

Left Breast    Right Breast

Scaly, red, or swollen skin on the breast, nipple, or areola (the dark area of skin at the center of the breast)

Left Breast    Right Breast

A rash or reddened area of the breast skin, with enlarged pores, giving the appearance of resembling an orange peel

Left Breast    Right Breast

Other changes:

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If you noticed any changes in your breasts, this is the information you should discuss with your health care provider:

These are the breast changes or problems I have noticed:

This is what the breast change looks or feels like: (Is the lump hard or soft? Does your breast feel tender or swollen? How big is the lump? What color is the nipple discharge?)

This is where the breast change is: (What part of the breast feels different? Do both breasts feel different or only one?)

This is when I first noticed the breast change and when I found it in relation to when my menstrual cycle occurred:

Since then, this is the change I've noticed: (Has it stayed the same or gotten worse?)

### Share your personal medical history:

I've had these breast problems in the past:

These are the breast exams and tests that I have had:

My last mammogram was on this date:

My last menstrual period began on this date:

Right now, I:

- Have breast implants
- Am pregnant
- Am breastfeeding

I've had this type of cancer before:

I have tested positive for a mutation in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes.

- Yes
- No

**Share your family medical history:**

My family members have had these breast problems or diseases:

These family members had breast cancer:

They were this age when they were diagnosed with breast cancer:

One (or more) of my family members has tested positive for a mutation in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes.

- Yes
- No

## Preparing for a Mammogram



If you and your doctor have determined you need a mammogram, based on your age and personal risk factors, do not put off this important screening. Here are the things you should do before, on the day of, during, and after your mammogram to help make the process easier and more effective.

### Before Your Mammogram

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- Schedule your mammogram a few days after your menstrual cycle. This is when your breasts are least sensitive. If you are no longer menstruating, schedule your mammogram at your earliest convenience.
- If you need access to a free or low-cost mammogram, NBCF can help. Refer to "WHERE TO GET A MAMMOGRAM" in this guide to learn more.
- Gather the below documents to take with you on the day of your appointment:

Proof of address

Proof of ID

Household income information (you will need this to find out if you qualify for a free mammogram)

A list of where and when you have had any previous mammograms, as well as the results of those mammograms. If you are getting your mammogram at a different facility than your last mammogram, you may be required to bring the prior mammograms with you. In some cases, you may be required to send your previous mammograms and accompanying reports in advance of your appointment.

If you are experiencing some type of breast abnormality, additional imaging like a diagnostic mammogram or ultrasound may be needed. Share this with the mammogram facility before your appointment in case additional imaging needs to be factored into scheduling. Please note that additional breast care exams may incur additional costs.

## The Day of Your Mammogram

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- Do not use any deodorant, lotion, cream or powder on your underarms or breasts. These will sometimes interfere with the mammogram reading.
- Provide your doctor with the documents and prior mammogram reports you gathered.
- Provide your doctor with the symptom checklist and medical history form. (Usually the mammography facility will request that you complete a breast history form and medical history form to help them determine if you are at an increased risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer.)
- Describe any breast symptoms or problems you are having.
- Take this journal with you to help you ask questions and take notes.

## During Your Mammogram

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Try to relax your entire body. During your mammogram, you will likely feel pressure for a few brief moments. While mammograms can be uncomfortable, they should not be painful for most women.

## After Your Mammogram

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- If you do not hear from your health care professional within 10 days, consult him or her to ask for your results. You may also request that a copy be sent to your gynecologist or primary care provider.
- If your mammogram results are normal, be sure to ask your health care provider when he or she recommends that you have your next mammogram, based on your age and family history.
- Be sure to ask your doctor if you have dense breasts and how this may affect your mammogram results.
- Have your doctor help you answer this: "My next mammogram is needed on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_." If possible, schedule this appointment before you leave the doctor's office.

## Abnormal Results

### What if they tell me that my mammogram was abnormal?

If your mammogram is abnormal, do not panic. An abnormal mammogram does not always mean that there is breast cancer.

If your screening mammogram shows an abnormality, you will need to have additional imaging studies to be able to tell whether or not the abnormality is breast cancer.

### Your doctor may order some of these tests:



#### **Diagnostic Mammogram**

An additional mammogram that focuses on a specific area of the breast, sometimes called "spot" imaging.



#### **Ultrasound**

An imaging test that uses sound waves to create a picture of your breast. The pictures may show whether a lump is a solid mass, a cyst filled with fluid, or both. While cysts are typically not cancerous, a solid lump may be a cancerous tumor or could be a benign tumor, known as a fibroadenoma.



#### **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)**

A test that uses a powerful magnet linked to a computer that creates detailed pictures of the breast. This type of test is highly sensitive, but not specific, so it shows virtually everything inside the breast and can carry false positive results sometimes. This imaging study is compared to the others to better determine what is causing the abnormality or symptom.



#### **Biopsy**

A procedure in which fluid or tissue is removed from your breast to check for the presence of breast cancer. Most biopsies today are done in a mammography facility using a needle to sample the cells or tissue.

**Questions to Ask Your Doctor If Your Mammogram Was Abnormal**

What tests will you perform to see if the abnormality is cancer?

When will I find out the results?

Will my insurance cover the additional tests? Will Medicare or Medicaid cover the additional tests?

Will I have to pay anything?

If the abnormality is not cancer, is it something I need treatment for?

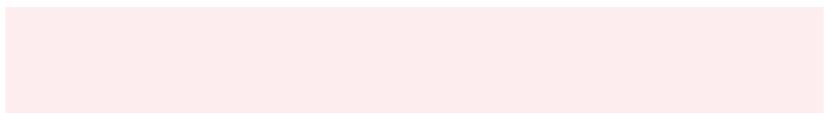
If the abnormality is not cancer, is it something that has been linked with a potentially higher rate of breast cancer in the future? (For example, a fibroadenoma.)

When should I have a follow-up mammogram?

### Questions to Ask Your Doctor if Breast Cancer is Diagnosed

To confirm a positive diagnosis of breast cancer, cells or tissues will be removed by surgery or with a needle from the abnormal area of the breast to be examined. This procedure is called a biopsy. If a biopsy confirms cancer, your doctor may perform several other tests to see if the breast cancer has spread to other areas of your body.

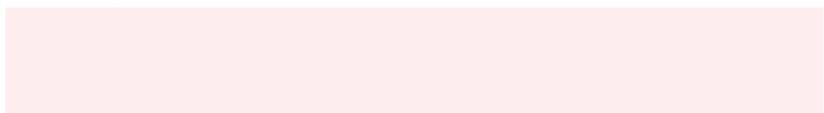
What did my biopsy or needle aspiration show?



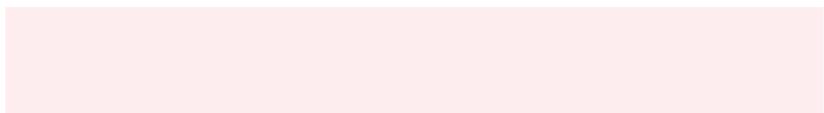
What kind of breast cancer do I have?



What stage of breast cancer am I in?



What size is the tumor?



Has the cancer spread to my lymph nodes or other parts of my body (metastasized)?



What are my treatment options?



What types of treatment would you recommend?

How much time do I have to make decisions about my treatment choices?

Who will coordinate my care?

- Health Care Provider:
- Office Phone Number:
- Facility Address:

What other tests will be done to check if the cancer has spread?

Will you refer me to a doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer (oncologist)?

If so, what is the contact information for the oncologist?

- Facility Name:
- Oncologist Name:
- Office Phone Number:
- Facility Address:
- Appointment Date:
- Appointment Time:

What is my chance for recovery (prognosis)?

# About NBCF



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## Helping Women Now®

National Breast Cancer Foundation's (NBCF) mission is to help women now by providing help and inspiring hope to those affected by breast cancer through early detection, education, and support services. NBCF was founded in 1991 by breast cancer survivor Janelle Hail, and is recognized by GuideStar, GreatNonprofits, and Charity Navigator for our accountability and transparency.

Learn more at [nbcf.org](http://nbcf.org).

## What We Do



### EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Community ambassadors and volunteers connect people with breast health information, local medical services, and breast cancer support.



### NATIONAL MAMMOGRAPHY PROGRAM (NMP)

We partner with medical facilities across the U.S. to provide free mammograms and diagnostic breast care services to underserved women.



### PATIENT NAVIGATOR PROGRAM

Our patient navigators help patients overcome the barriers of cost, fear, and misinformation by helping underserved women to navigate the health care system.



### SUPPORT SERVICES

We provide emotional support, guidance and resources for patients and survivors at every step—whether they're newly diagnosed, facing a terminal diagnosis, or experiencing breast cancer alone.

## Learn More & Get Involved



Visit [www.nbcf.org](http://www.nbcf.org) to learn more about National Breast Cancer Foundation's mission and programs.



Become an NBCF volunteer. Find out how you can continue educating women in your community by contacting our NBCF volunteer team at [volunteer@nbcf.org](mailto:volunteer@nbcf.org).



Connect with us to share the message of hope by following our social media channels:

- “Like” us on Facebook: [facebook.com/nationalbreastcancer](https://facebook.com/nationalbreastcancer)
- Follow us on Twitter: [twitter.com/nbcf](https://twitter.com/nbcf)
- Follow us on Instagram: [instagram.com/nbcf](https://instagram.com/nbcf)



