



Mammogram 101



NATIONAL
BREAST
CANCER
FOUNDATION, INC.®

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. There are things you can do to help make the process easier and more effective. This guide will help you partner with your medical professional to know what to do before, on the day of, during, and after your mammogram.

Note: If you've received the COVID-19 vaccination recently, read about why you may want to delay your screening mammogram. See Appendix for more information.

Before Your Mammogram:

- Schedule your mammogram a few days after your menstrual cycle. This is when your breasts are least sensitive.
- If you need access to a free or low-cost mammogram, NBCF can help. Refer to "Where To Get A Free Mammogram" below 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
- A list of where and when you have had any previous mammograms, as well as the results of those mammograms.

The Day of Your Mammogram:

- Do not use any deodorant, lotion, cream or powder on your underarms or breasts. These can sometimes interfere with the mammogram reading.
- Provide your doctor with the documents you gathered.
- Provide your doctor with the symptom checklist. [View appendix for a copy of the symptom checklist]
- Describe any breast symptoms or problems you are having.

During Your Mammogram:

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:

- If you do not hear from your health care professional within 10 days, consult him or her to ask for your results and/or ask a patient navigator for help.
- If your mammogram results are normal, be sure to ask your health care provider when he or she feels that you should have your next mammogram, based on your age and family history.
- If your mammogram results are abnormal, we encourage you to check out our helpful resource, *Abnormal Mammograms & What to Do Next*, that will arm you with the information you need to understand your next steps. <http://resources.nationalbreastcancer.org/abnormal-mammogram/>
- 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 question: “When is my next mammogram needed?” Date: _____ Schedule this appointment before you leave the doctor’s office.

WHERE TO GET A FREE 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:

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:

National Mammography Program

nbcf.org/national-mammography-program

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

National Breast & Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program

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

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.

APPENDIX



Breast Cancer Symptom Checklist

Complete this checklist if you have noticed any changes in your breast. 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 Date first noticed:

- A change in the size or shape of the breast

Left Breast Right Breast Date first noticed:

- Dimpling or puckering in the skin of the breast

Left Breast Right Breast Date first noticed:

- A nipple turned inward into the breast

Left Breast Right Breast Date first noticed:

- Discharge (fluid) from the nipple

Left Breast Right Breast Date first noticed:

- 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 Date first noticed:

- Other changes:

COVID-19 Vaccine & Mammograms: What You Need to Know

If I get the COVID-19 vaccine, does it impact when I should get my next screening exam (mammogram)?

It depends on the type of exam. If women can safely delay a **screening exam** (screening mammogram or screening breast MRI) for 4-6 weeks or get their screening exam before their COVID-19 vaccine, that would be best.

Diagnostic imaging and exams for evaluation of a new symptom (new lump, pain, nipple discharge, a new diagnosis of breast cancer) should not be delayed.

Why do I need to delay my screening mammogram after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine?

Breast imagers have been noticing underarm lymph node enlargement appearing on mammograms and breast MRIs, related to COVID-19 vaccine administration in the same arm that received the vaccination.

The COVID-19 vaccine triggers the immune system to be turned on, which in turn triggers the lymphatic system to turn on. This can result in the underarm lymph nodes (also known as axillary nodes) to swell and be what doctors call "reactive". This can simulate an infection or even appear to be cancer in these nodes. **To avoid confusion and recall, the timing of a routine screening mammogram should be made based on when the COVID-19 vaccines were given.**

The COVID-19 vaccine causes more significant lymph node enlargement than other vaccines we have seen in the past (like the flu vaccine). Patients with enlarged underarm lymph nodes will be recalled from screening mammograms or MRIs for additional imaging like ultrasound.

In keeping with the [Society of Breast Imaging guidelines](#), it's recommended that recalled patients have short interval follow-up of the nodes (4-12 weeks). If nodes are persistently large at follow-up, a biopsy will be advised. This should allow time for the lymph nodes to return to their normal size.

I am concerned about delaying my screening mammogram after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. What can I do?

Patients should feel comfortable discussing any concerns with their healthcare team, whether that's a primary doctor or a nurse. If not prompted, it's recommended that the patient share whether she has had a COVID-19 vaccine, date, and which arm, so her healthcare team can record the details.