BREAST HEALTH VISUAL STORIES
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Breast Health

Breast cancer is a disease that can happen when the cells in the breast grow abnormally fast. It is more easily treated if it is caught early. If not caught early, it can spread outside of the breast to other parts of the body and be harder to treat. Getting mammograms regularly can help keep me healthy by monitoring for signs of breast cancer so that it can be identified early.
What Is A Mammogram?

A mammogram is an x-ray picture of the breast. A mammogram is the best way to catch breast cancer early. It is best to get mammograms regularly so that they can be compared to each other over time. Most women get mammograms every year after the age of 40. If someone has a mother or sister who have had breast cancer, mammograms might be done earlier. After the age of 50, the mammograms may be less frequent. I should follow my doctor’s advice on when to get mammograms so that I can stay healthy.

Routine Mammograms

Mammograms are typically done to screen for breast cancer every year after the age of 40. If the mammogram is a screening study, it will be completed and the results will be available a few days afterwards.

Diagnostic Mammograms

If there is a concern about one of a woman’s breast, she will get a diagnostic mammogram. In this case, the woman will wait for the results after the test is completed.
Before My Mammogram

In order to schedule a mammogram, I will need a prescription from my doctor.

Before I come for my mammogram, I should get a phone call to confirm my appointment. I will need to have my insurance card and prescription when they call. They may also ask if I have any symptoms of being sick. If I have a fever or other signs of being sick, or have been around anyone sick, I may need to reschedule my appointment.

When I Arrive For My Mammogram

When I arrive at my appointment, I may be asked to fill out some forms about my history and any concerns that I have about my breasts. They will ask for my prescription, ID card, and perhaps a payment for the visit.
How Is A Mammogram Done?

I will be asked to stand in front of the special x-ray machine. The technologist will ask me to take off one side of the gown. The technologist will put the breast on a smooth surface. Another one will flatten the breast from above. The breast needs to be flat for the x-ray to be taken. After the breast is positioned, the technologist may adjust my breast or move my arm or shoulder to a different position. The technologist may ask me to hold my breath for a minute. I might feel a squeezing pressure. Mammograms can be uncomfortable but should be over quickly. The machine might whirl and move while it takes the picture. The technologist will repeat this to get a few pictures of each breast.

The technologist will check the x-rays to make sure that they do not need to be redone. The technologist cannot tell me the results. Specialized doctors called radiologists will look at the x-rays to see if there is any sign of cancer or other problems.

Sometimes I will wait in the mammogram room while someone looks at my pictures. I may wait in another waiting room. It is possible more pictures will need to be taken. That is because everyone wants to do a good job at making sure I am healthy.
Things To Think About Before The Mammogram

The week before I expect my period is not the best time to get a mammogram. That is because my breasts might be more likely to feel discomfort during this time.

Deodorant or antiperspirant can look like spots on the mammogram. It is better to put on deodorant or antiperspirant on after the test, and not before.

When I go in for the mammogram, I will need to undress from the waist up. It is easier to wear a separate top instead of a dress, romper, or jump suit.

I will need to have my insurance card, ID card, prescription, and possibly a copay when I come for my mammogram appointment.

Getting Results

Usually, I will get the results of my mammogram by a phone call, a written letter mailed to my house, or My Chart.

Sometimes, the radiologist will look at my x-rays while I am still in the office and give me the results before I leave, but this is less common. This is more likely to happen with a diagnostic mammogram.

If My Mammogram Is Abnormal

An abnormal mammogram does not immediately mean that I have cancer. It usually means that more tests need to be done or a need to see another specialist, a breast surgeon. If there is a worrisome spot, they might take a sample of the tissue from that spot and test it for cancer. If it is cancer, there are a lot of treatments that can help me.
Other Tests

Sometimes the doctor will order other tests to understand what is happening inside my breasts and to make sure that they are healthy.

Breast Ultrasound

The doctor may order a breast ultrasound. When the technician does this test, I will lie down and uncover one of my breasts. The technician will squirt a clear jelly on it. This helps the test work better. The technician will then roll a probe over the area which sends an image of inside to a screen. The radiologist reviews the images.

Biopsy

If there is an area suspicious for cancer, the doctors may do a breast biopsy. This is when they take a sample of the suspicious area with a needle and send it to a specialist called a pathologist to understand if the tissue is healthy or not. They will give me some medicine so that I will not be uncomfortable during the test. Everyone wants to be sure I am healthy and comfortable!

Biopsy Result

The biopsy results can take 2-5 days to come back. If the doctors do find breast cancer, I will follow up with a surgeon and an oncologist. It is important to stay positive as there are a lot of treatments for breast cancer today.