What you need to know about Mammograms
Breast cancer can happen at any age, but the risk goes up as you get older. If you are a woman 40 years of age or older, talk with a doctor about the breast cancer screening plan that’s best for you.

Screening for breast cancer can help find it early. Finding breast cancer early – when it’s small and has not spread – gives you more treatment choices and can help save your life.

**How do I find breast cancer early?**

*All women* should talk to a doctor about the known pros, cons, and possible harms linked to breast cancer screening.

*All women* should also know how their breasts normally look and feel so they can notice changes quickly. Any breast change should be reported to a doctor right away.

*Women ages 40 to 44* should have the choice to start annual breast cancer screening if they wish to do so.

*Women ages 45 to 54* should get mammograms every year.

*Women 55 and older* can keep getting screened every year or can switch to mammograms every 2 years.

Screening should be done as long as a woman is in good health and is expected to live at least 10 more years.

*Some women at high risk for breast cancer* – because of their family history, a genetic tendency, or other factors – may need to have an MRI along with their mammograms. Talk to your doctor about your risk for breast cancer and the best screening plan for you.

If your doctor hasn’t told you about a mammogram, it doesn’t mean you don’t need one. Ask about it yourself. Insist on getting the care you deserve!
What is a mammogram?
A mammogram is an x-ray of the breasts. It can often help find breast cancer before a lump can be felt.

Common questions women have about breast cancer and mammograms

What if I feel or see something on my breast that worries me?
If you find a lump, see any dimpling or puckering of the skin, or notice any new change in the way your breasts feel or look, see a doctor right away. It probably isn’t cancer, but do yourself a favor and have it checked out.

No one in my family has ever had breast cancer, so do I really need to be screened?
Yes. Your risk is greater if a close relative has had breast cancer.

If I’m going to get breast cancer, there’s nothing I can do about it.
Yes, there is. We can’t stop all breast cancers, but we know that finding cancer when it’s small and has not spread gives a woman the best chance of beating this disease. A mammogram can often help find a tumor before you can feel it.

If a lump is found while it’s still small and only in the breast, a woman has more treatment choices. Early detection means that a woman’s chances for saving her breast are better, and treatment will almost always have fewer side effects.

Mammograms cost a lot. How can I afford one?
Medicare, Medicaid, and almost all insurance plans cover mammograms. There are some low-cost mammogram programs,
too. Some doctors, hospitals, or clinics also may lower their fees for women who can’t afford the usual charge. Call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 to learn more about low-cost programs where you live.

Mammograms are x-rays. Are they safe?
Throughout the years, both the machines and how mammograms are done have greatly improved. Today, the level of radiation is very low and the benefits of mammograms outweigh the risk.

How can I prepare for a mammogram? What do I wear?

- If you’re going to a facility for the first time, bring a list of the places and dates of mammograms, biopsies, or other breast treatments you’ve had before.

- If you’ve had mammograms at another facility, try to get those records to bring with you to the new facility (or have them sent there) so the old pictures can be compared to the new ones.

- Schedule your mammogram when your breasts are not tender or swollen to help reduce discomfort and get good pictures. Try to avoid the week just before your period.
• It’s a good idea to wear a blouse with a skirt or pants, rather than a dress, since you’ll have to undress above the waist. You’ll be given a short gown to wear during the exam.

• Don’t wear deodorant, powder, or cream under your arms. Some of these have substances that can show up on the x-ray as white spots.

**Using a Mammogram Facility**

• Use a facility that specializes in mammograms and does many mammograms a day. Ask to see the FDA certificate showing that the facility meets high-quality standards.

• Try to go to the same facility every time so that your mammograms can easily be compared from year to year.

**What’s it like to get a mammogram? Does it hurt? Is it embarrassing?**

When you get a mammogram, you stand beside the machine, and a specially trained technologist helps place your breast on a plastic plate. A second plastic plate is put on top, and for a few seconds, the top plate is pushed down and flattens the breast to get a good, clear picture. Two pictures usually are taken of each breast. Many women feel some discomfort. Tell the technologist if you have pain. A mammogram takes about 15 minutes. But the squeezing only lasts a short time.

A specialist, called a radiologist, will look at the mammogram to see if there are any areas of concern. If you don’t hear from your health care provider within 10 days, do not assume that your mammogram was normal. Call your provider or the facility where the mammogram was done.
What happens if they find something?

Getting called back after a screening mammogram is fairly common and doesn’t mean you have breast cancer.

Getting called back is more common after a first mammogram, or when there’s no previous mammogram to compare the new mammogram with. It’s also more common in women who haven’t gone through menopause.

If a suspicious area is found, you may have more mammogram pictures taken. An ultrasound may also be done. This test will show if it’s a fluid-filled cyst that’s not cancer, or a solid mass, which may or may not be cancer.

If the area still looks suspicious, a doctor may use a thin, hollow needle to take out a small piece of it. (Removing all or part of the suspicious area is called a biopsy [by-op-see].) This piece is tested in a lab to see if there are cancer cells in it.

A biopsy is the only sure way to know if you have breast cancer. But even if you’re told you need a biopsy, remember that most lumps or suspicious areas are not cancer.

If the biopsy shows that you have cancer, you and your doctor will discuss treatment options. Early breast cancer often can be treated by taking out the lump or part of the breast rather than the whole breast.
Get regular mammograms.

Regular breast cancer screening with mammograms can often help find breast cancer early – when it’s small and has not spread. This is when there are more treatment choices and treatment works best.

You need to know about mammograms! Here are some breast cancer screening steps you may be willing to take. They could save your life!

☐ I will call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345 or go online to www.cancer.org to find out more about mammograms and breast cancer.

☐ I will ask my doctor or nurse how to get a mammogram.

☐ I will schedule my mammogram.

☐ I will call if I don’t get the results of my mammogram.