

So, You Want to Know More about Screening Mammography . . .



Having regular screening mammograms will decrease your risk of dying from breast cancer. Do you wonder by how much? It depends on when you start having mammograms and how often you have them.

If you get screened this often:	You will reduce your risk of dying of breast cancer by:	Number of women whose lives will be saved (per 100,000 screened)
Yearly, from age 40–84*	40%	1,190
Yearly, age 45–54; every other year, age 55–79~	31%	925
Every other year, age 50–74^	23%	695

*American College of Radiology, Society of Breast Imaging, American Society of Breast Surgeons and National Comprehensive Cancer Network

~American Cancer Society

^United States Preventive Services Task Force

What age should I start getting screened?

Breast cancer is an important health issue for women in their 40s. It is the second leading cause of all deaths for women in this age group.

1. Half of all fatal breast cancers are diagnosed before age 50.
2. All of the major health care groups agree that yearly screening starting at age 40 saves the most lives. In fact, starting screening at age 40 will save 100,000 more lives every decade than starting at age 50.
3. Black, Hispanic and Asian women are at particularly high risk of developing aggressive forms of early onset breast cancer, particularly in their 40s.
4. Women who do not get screened and develop breast cancer in their 40s are almost 3.5 times more likely to need a mastectomy and 2.5 times more likely to need chemotherapy.

No one in my family has had breast cancer. Can I start screening later?

Yearly screening starting at age 40 is still important, even for those women who do not have a family history of breast cancer.

1. Three out of four women who develop breast cancer have no family history of breast cancer and no other risk factors besides being women.
2. All women, especially Black women and those of Ashkenazi Jewish descent, should talk to their doctors about their risk for breast cancer by age 30. If you turn out to be at higher-than-average risk, you may want to consider additional screening with ultrasound or MRI.

What are the risks of screening mammography?

The benefits of screening are clear, but there are potential risks to consider.

1. **Anxiety** – Some women get nervous around the time of their mammogram. Fortunately, any anxiety is almost always brief.
2. **False Positives (recalls)** – About 1 in 10 women will be told they need a few extra mammogram pictures or a breast ultrasound to clarify something questioned on the screening exam.
3. **Biopsies** – Almost all biopsies performed today are minimally invasive needle procedures. Biopsy procedures accurately confirm or rule out breast cancer without the need for surgery. Fortunately, only 1 or 2 in 100 women are recommended for biopsy from screening, so most women will go their whole lives without needing a biopsy.
4. **Overdiagnosis** – Some small and slow-growing breast cancers found on a mammogram may stay small and never go on to harm a patient. However, research shows that only 1% to 10% of breast cancers found at screening may be “overdiagnosed” and most of these are found in women in their 80s.
5. **Radiation** – The radiation from a screening mammogram is less than the radiation we all receive from two months of exposure to natural sources of radiation. The science is clear that the benefits of early detection far outweigh the potential, very small risk from the additional radiation of a screening mammogram.

When can I stop having screening mammograms?

We don’t know exactly. Although the most rigorous type of research on breast cancer screening does not include women over the age of 74 years, other studies confirm the lifesaving benefits of screening in older women.

Compared to women who are not screened, women age 75 to 84 who continue to have screening mammograms every year cut their chance of dying of breast cancer by about 65–70%, and if they get screened every other year, they cut their chance of dying of breast cancer in half.



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Where can I get more answers to questions about screening mammography?

Please visit MammographySavesLives.org and EndTheConfusion.org for more information.