



Mammogram FAQ

What type of equipment is used?

A mammography unit is a rectangular box that houses the tube in which x-rays are produced. The unit is used exclusively for x-ray exams of the breast, with special accessories that allow only the breast to be exposed to the x-rays. Attached to the unit is a device that holds and compresses the breast and positions it so images can be obtained at different angles.

How is the procedure performed?

Mammography is performed on an outpatient basis.

During mammography, a specially educated radiologic technologist will position your breast in the mammography unit. Your breast will be placed on a special platform and compressed with a paddle (often made of clear Plexiglas or other plastic). The technologist will gradually compress your breast.

Why breast compression is necessary.

Even out the breast thickness so that all of the tissue can be visualized.

Spread out the tissue so that small abnormalities are less likely to be obscured by overlying breast tissue.

Allow the use of a lower x-ray dose since a thinner amount of breast tissue is being imaged.

Hold the breast still in order to minimize blurring of the image caused by motion.

Reduce x-ray scatter to increase sharpness of picture.

The technologist will stand behind a glass shield during the x-ray exposure. You will be asked to change positions between images. The routine views are a top-to-bottom view and an oblique side view. The process will be repeated for the other breast.

You must hold very still and may be asked to keep from breathing for a few seconds while the x-ray picture is taken to reduce the possibility of a blurred image. The technologist will walk behind a wall to activate the x-ray machine.

When the examination is complete, you will be asked to wait until the radiologist determines that all the necessary images have been obtained.

The examination process should take about 30 minutes.

What can I expect during the exam?

You will feel pressure on your breast as it is squeezed by the compression paddle. Some women with sensitive breasts may experience discomfort. If this is the case, schedule the procedure when your breasts are least tender. Be sure to inform the technologist if pain occurs as compression is increased. If discomfort is significant, less compression may be used.

What can I expect after the exam?

A radiologist, a physician specifically trained to supervise and interpret radiology examinations, will analyze the images and send a signed report to your primary care or referring physician, who will discuss the results with you. You will also be notified of the results by the mammography facility.