

## What are the risks and benefits of screening?

### Risks\*

- Your mammogram may show no signs of an abnormality even though breast cancer is present.
- Some women will have a false alarm because something abnormal is found on mammogram. But after more tests (such as another mammogram, an ultrasound or a biopsy), no cancer is found. This may take 4 to 6 weeks, causing worry in women. Sometimes, the worry lasts long after the test results are known.
- Even though your screening mammogram found breast cancer, your quality of life or the number of years you live may not change. Some breast cancers found by screening would otherwise cause no problems because women would die of something else first. These breast cancers could be slow growing cancers. So, if women with these cancers had not had screening, they might never have known they had cancer and would not have had treatment.

### Benefits

More than 95% of women are alive and well 5 years after their breast cancer was found and treated early.

Although screening mammograms do not prevent breast cancer, regular screening mammograms can:

- find cancer early when treatment is likely to work better
- often find small tumours in the breast before they can be felt
- let the radiologist compare your current and past mammograms to look for changes in your breasts
- reduce deaths from breast cancer up to 30% when combined with clinical breast exams

## Remember

Screening mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early. Breast cancer screening saves lives!

\* Public Health Agency of Canada. Information on Mammography for Women Aged 40 and Older: A Decision Aid for Breast Cancer Screening in Canada. Chronic Disease Management Division, Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2009.

## About the Alberta Breast Cancer Screening Program

The Alberta Breast Cancer Screening Program (ABCSP) is coordinated by Alberta Health Services in partnership with the Alberta Society of Radiologists. The ABCSP mails your screening mammogram results to you. The program also supports women and their healthcare providers by sending reminders when women are overdue for screening mammograms.

To get letters from the ABCSP your name and address must be up to date with Alberta Health and Wellness; call 310-0000 (toll free) then dial 780-427-1432.

Screening is one of the best things you can do for yourself to find breast cancer early. Breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screening saves lives.

For more information, please contact

### Cancer Screening Programs

Phone 1-866-727-3926

Fax 1-888-944-3388

[screeningforlife.ca](http://screeningforlife.ca)

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# BREAST SCREENING

Do I Really Need a Mammogram?



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### What is a screening mammogram?

A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast. Screening mammograms are routine checks for women who have no apparent breast problems. They can find an abnormality or lump in the breast that is too small to be felt.

### Why are screening mammograms important?

About 1 in 8 women in Alberta will be diagnosed with breast cancer during their lifetime. Screening mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, when treatment may work better.

### Should I have a screening mammogram?

The risk of breast cancer increases as women get older. Women under the age of 40 don't need screening mammograms.

*If you are 40 to 49:* talk to your healthcare provider about your breast cancer risk and your need for screening mammograms. For women in this age group it is less clear that the benefits of mammograms outweigh the risks.

*If you are 50 to 69 and have no breast problems that you know of:* have screening mammograms regularly. Research shows that regular screening mammograms reduce deaths from breast cancer for women 50 to 69.

*If you are 70 and over:* talk to your healthcare provider about whether screening mammograms should be part of your breast health routine.

But what if ...

- I feel healthy and I have no symptoms
- I have no family history of breast cancer
- I have small breasts

	YES	NO
• I feel healthy and I have no symptoms	✓	
• I have no family history of breast cancer	✓	
• I have small breasts	✓	

You still need to...

**HAVE REGULAR SCREENING MAMMOGRAMS.**

### What is a diagnostic mammogram?

Diagnostic mammograms are special x-rays of the breast that provide more images than a screening mammogram. They can be used to look more closely at changes found during a screening mammogram. They are also used for women with breast implants, for women who have already had breast cancer, and for women who have signs of breast cancer.

Possible signs of breast cancer can include:

- a new lump in your breast or armpit
- nipple turned inward, if it isn't usually
- crusting, bleeding or a rash on your nipple
- nipple discharge
- dimpling or thickening of skin in one area of your breast

### How do I get ready for a screening mammogram?

When you make your mammogram appointment, you will be asked where and when you had your last mammogram.

On the day of your appointment:

- wear a two-piece outfit as you will need to undress from the waist up
- don't wear underarm deodorant or body powder. These can affect the mammogram results

### How is a screening mammogram done?

A female technologist will do your screening mammogram. Once you are standing in front of the mammography unit:

- your breast will rest on a plastic plate that can be adjusted for your height
- a second plate will press down on your breast to spread out the breast tissue so that small abnormalities can be seen
- two x-rays will be taken of each breast: one from the top and one from the side

The whole process takes about 10 minutes.



### Do mammograms hurt?

Some women find mammograms uncomfortable. Others find them painful but tolerable. Your breasts need to be compressed to get the best image possible. Each compression lasts for only a few seconds. Women who normally have tender breasts may find it more comfortable to have their screening mammogram between day 7 and 14 of their menstrual cycle.

### What are the possible results?

*Normal Result:* A normal result means no signs of breast cancer were found. About 93% of women screened have a normal result.

*Abnormal Result:* Only a small number of abnormalities will be cancer; however, any abnormality should be checked right away. Your healthcare provider will arrange for the needed tests. Other tests may include a diagnostic mammogram, an ultrasound, or a biopsy.

To learn more about abnormal screening mammogram results, see our brochure *"Making Sense of Abnormal Mammogram Results"*, available at [screeningforlife.ca](http://screeningforlife.ca) or by calling 1-866-727-3926.

### When do I return for a screening mammogram?

*If you are 40 to 49:* and decide to have screening mammograms, have one every year. Breasts are made of fat and glandular tissue. In younger women, the breast tissue may be dense (have less fat) so small cancers are not seen easily.

*If you are 50 to 69:* have one at least every 2 years, as decided by you and your healthcare provider.

*If you are 70 or over:* talk with your healthcare provider about how often to return.

Along with screening mammograms:

- make sure your breasts are examined yearly by your healthcare provider as part of your regular health check-up
- know what looks and feels normal for you. Tell your healthcare provider if you notice any unusual changes