Mammography
How to prepare for your exam

What is screening mammography?

Screening mammography (or mammogram) is a type of X-ray that takes images of the breast. The Breast Imaging Department at University of Washington Medical Center Roosevelt uses a digital mammography system that makes having a mammogram fast and easy. This exam gives our doctors highly detailed images to check for breast abnormalities (changes).

Most medical experts agree that finding and treating breast cancer early is linked to good health outcomes. Mammography helps find breast cancers early because it can show changes in the breast before a patient or doctor can feel any changes.

Current guidelines advise women age 40 and older to have a mammogram every year. These guidelines were developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the American Cancer Society (ACS), the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American College of Radiology (ACR).

The National Cancer Institute advises some women to have a mammogram before they turn 40. This includes women who have had breast cancer and women who are at increased risk of cancer because of their family history of breast cancer. These women should ask their doctor if they should begin having mammograms before age 40 and how often they should have them.

How does the exam work?

During a mammogram, the breast is exposed to a small dose of radiation to produce an image of the breast tissue.

How should I prepare for my exam?

- Before setting a date for your mammogram, tell your doctor about any new findings or problems in your breasts. Also tell your doctor about any past breast surgeries, implants, biopsies, hormone use, and family or personal history of breast cancer.
• If you are still having menstrual periods, do not schedule your mammogram for the week before your period if your breasts are often tender during this time. The best time for this exam is 1 week after your period ends.

• **Tell your doctor or the technologist** (the person who takes the images of your breasts) if you are pregnant, or if there is any chance you might be pregnant.

• Do not wear deodorant, talcum powder, or lotion under your arms or on your breasts on the day of the exam. These can look like calcium spots on the X-ray images.

• You will be given special wipes to clean your underarms and breasts before the images are taken.

• If you have had mammograms somewhere else in the past, bring your past mammogram films if you can. The radiologist (the doctor who will examine your images) will compare them to your current images.

• Before your exam, you will be asked to remove all your clothing above your waist. We will give you a gown or loose-fitting garment that opens in the front. You may be asked to remove your jewelry.

**How is the exam done?**

1. During mammography, a specially trained female technologist will help you get in the right position to take images of your breast. Images will be taken of 1 breast at a time. The breast is placed on a special platform and compressed with a paddle.

   This breast compression is done to:
   • Even out the breast so that all of the tissue can be seen.
   • Spread out the tissue so that any abnormal tissue will not be hidden by other breast tissue.
   • Allow us to use a lower X-ray dose.
   • Hold the breast still so that the images are not blurry.

2. The technologist will go behind a shield while taking the X-ray images.

3. The technologist will help you change position slightly between images. Usually, 2 images of each breast are taken: a top-to-bottom view and a side view.

4. The exam takes about 10 minutes. After the images are taken, you will be asked to wait until the technologist reviews them to decide if more are needed.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Imaging Services: 206-598-6868

What will I feel during the exam?

You will feel pressure on your breast as it is compressed by the paddle. Some women with sensitive breasts may feel uncomfortable. If you have sensitive breasts, have the exam done when your breasts are least tender. The technologist will apply pressure slowly to reduce discomfort.

Be sure to tell the technologist if you feel pain. If you are in a great deal of distress, less compression will be used.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist trained in mammography will read your films and interpret the results. You will receive a letter with your results in the mail within 7 to 10 work days. Your health care provider will also receive a report and be able to answer your questions about your mammogram.

If you have not received a letter with your results in the mail in 10 days, call our office at 206-288-7800.

What if my results letter asks me to return for more tests?

Your results letter may ask you to return for more mammogram views or for an ultrasound. Do not worry if this happens. Repeat testing is fairly common. It only means that the radiologist would like a better look at some areas of your breast, or some images may need to be repeated because of technical issues.

To schedule repeat testing, call 206-288-7800.

Patients who had their mammography screening at UWMC Roosevelt Radiology Clinic or a Seattle Cancer Care Alliance (SCCA) Mobile Mammography van will have their repeat testing done at the Breast Imaging Center at SCCA. These extra images will be reviewed by the on-site Breast Imaging Radiologist. You will receive the results of your exam before you leave.