

What is a mammography?

Mammography uses a special X-ray machine to detect breast problems. It is the best method at detecting early breast cancer particularly for women over 40 years of age. Some women who are at very high risk of developing breast cancer may have mammograms at a younger age or if there are breast symptoms such as nipple discharge or a lump.

Preparation

It is recommended that you wear two-piece clothing. On the day of your mammogram please do not use deodorant or talcum powder. These can show up on your mammograms and can sometimes be mistaken for breast problems.

How is the test performed?

To see the breast tissue with mammography, your breasts will need to be firmly compressed for a few seconds and this can be uncomfortable. The machine uses small doses of X-ray radiation. The potential benefits of detecting breast disease, particularly early breast cancer, are believed to outweigh any side effects.

After the films have been taken the Radiologist (a doctor) will view the films. It is not uncommon to need further views. Your mammograms will also need to be compared with any previous mammograms.

Ultrasound scanning

Ultrasound scanning of the breast is often performed at the time of your mammogram. If you are aged under 35 years, it is often the first test to be performed. A mammogram is not as helpful in this age group, as the breast tissue is very dense. As you get older, the breast tissue becomes replaced with fat which makes the mammograms easier to interpret.

Biopsy

Depending on the results of your test your doctor may ask for a biopsy. This might be performed under ultrasound or X-ray control to target the area of interest in the breast. You do not need to fast for the biopsy. Sometimes a Pathologist (a doctor) will be at the biopsy to look at the tissue. It usually takes a few days for the results to come back, and you will need to make an appointment with your own doctor to get these results.