

Breast Cancer Screening

Breast cancer is common. One in nine women in the U.S. will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. In most cases, women who develop breast cancer have no family history of breast cancer. Mammograms can detect breast cancers several years before they can be felt through breast exam, often when tumors are small and can be successfully treated through less invasive measures. Screening mammography clearly saves lives in women age 50 to 75, but there is debate about whether to start mammography at an earlier age.

- **For average-risk women under age 40, routine screening is not recommended.** There is no scientific evidence that screening mammography in this age group saves lives.
- **Average-risk women ages 40 to 49 should discuss screening mammography with their physicians.** The medical community has different opinions on whether to recommend routine screening mammography for women in this age group. Medical organizations weigh the risks and benefits of screening differently.

Women ages 40-49 have a smaller risk of breast cancer compared to women over age 49. These younger women also are more likely to have an abnormal mammogram and most of these abnormal mammograms in women age 40 – 49 turn out to be “false positives” (meaning that further tests are needed to ultimately rule out cancer). Talk to your physician about your personal risk for breast cancer, including family history and general health, to make your decision about when to start mammography screening.

- **Women ages 50 to 74 should have a screening mammogram every two years.** The majority of mammography’s benefit in this age group can be achieved by screening every two years instead of every year.
- **For women ages 75 and older, screening depends on a woman’s personal preference and her general health.** The possibility of dying from breast cancer declines after the age of 75. However, women in this age group may face more complications from follow up testing and treatment.

What else should women think about when making breast cancer screening decisions? In addition to personal preference, women also should consider their personal risk of breast cancer. Breast cancer risk is increased if one’s parent or sibling or other close blood relatives had breast or ovarian cancer. Risk is also increased by radiation treatment to the chest or previous breast biopsy with an abnormal result. Talk to your physician about screening more frequently if you are at higher than average risk for breast cancer.

Please talk with your doctor about screening options and questions you may have. For more information, you can go to:

- Sutter Health: <http://www.cancer.sutterhealth.org/information/breastcancer.html>
- US Preventive Services Task Force: <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspsbrca.htm>