

How-To

Prepare for a mammogram

Many do not look forward to their annual mammogram, but new technology and helpful tips can help women prepare for this life-saving procedure.

“Annual mammogram screenings decrease a woman’s risk of dying from breast cancer,” says Dr. Sherrill Little of Booth Radiology. “It isn’t perfect, but it does find the majority of the cancers, and it is the best tool we have.”

A mammography is a low-dose x-ray that examines the breasts to look for signs of cancer. The American Cancer Society and American College of Radiology recommends women between the ages of 35 and 40 receive a baseline mammogram, and then a yearly one after age 40.

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Benefit outweighs discomfort

Little says some of her patients are hesitant to receive a mammogram because they are afraid it may hurt. But, she says, the benefits of a mammogram are more important than the minor discomfort.

Compression is needed during the mammogram to take the best possible image while exposing the patient to the least amount of radiation. The compression may cause discomfort, but it is not serious and will not cause any damage to the breast tissue.

“I’ve seen mammograms save hundreds of women’s lives,” says Little. “It doesn’t really hurt; it’s just 15 seconds of pressure. And if a woman has had an uncomfortable mammogram in the past she can take an Advil before coming in for the procedure.”

Another bit of advice from Little: If a woman has a good experience with one of the mammography technicians notice her name so the next year she can schedule a mammogram with the same technician.

There is a modified technique for women with breast implants to obtain a good image, so it is important for those who do have breast implants to advise the mammography technician.

Little says other women are hesitant to receive a mammogram because they are worried it won’t detect their cancer. But new, more advanced technology is making it even easier for doctors to spot a problem.

Digital mammography

Booth Radiology uses digital mammography with R2 Checker. This technology allows the images of a mammogram to be stored on a computer instead of using film. It has a higher resolution and lets doctors manipulate the pictures to view them better, says Little.

“It finds breast cancer better, especially in women with denser breast tissue,” says Little. “And the R2 Checker recognizes masses and calcifications, and then prompts the doctor to double check the area that it marks as possible cancer so nothing is missed.”

If something is noticed on a mammogram, a doctor may recommend more scans be taken, a breast ultrasound or MRI and, lastly, a biopsy. But Little says women should not worry if asked to take another mammogram.

“The vast majority of mammograms are completely normal, and even if a woman is called back to take extra pictures, that is normal,” she says. “Usually it is nothing to worry about.”

Results

Mammograms are usually read by an expert within one to two days, and then the results are given to the patient’s doctor. Two to three weeks after the mammogram is taken, a patient will receive a letter explaining the results.

Booth Radiology is a full-service imaging center that offers diagnostic testing ranging from the very basic x-ray to the technically advanced PET CT. It has been providing outpatient radiology and imaging services since 1948.

All of Booth Radiology radiologists are board certified by the American Board of Radiology. And their fellowship-trained physicians provide an exceptionally broad range of sub-specialty expertise including PET/CT, MRI and Nuclear Medicine.

Little’s fellowship is in mammography from the Medical College of Virginia, Richmond, Va. She is a frequent lecturer of mammography topics including Stereotactic Breast Biopsy.

Booth Radiology has offices in Stratford, Washington and Woodbury. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call (856) 848-4998 or visit www.boothradiology.com. **HTG**

Here is advice from Dr. Sherrill Little and www.boothradiology.com that can help women prepare for a mammogram:

- Wear a two-piece outfit.
- Do not use deodorants, powders, ointments or creams. “Some deodorants and powders have metal in them which shows up as calcifications on the mammogram,” says Little. “Calcifications are what we look for to find cancer.”
- The exam takes about 30 minutes.
- If you have breast pain during your menstrual period, avoid scheduling your mammogram at that time.