Mammography Information

A mammography is a procedure that uses x-rays to make pictures of breast tissue. Mammography is suggested to screen for breast cancer in women over 40 years of age. It will help find the cause of breast lumps. If you are over 50, or have a family history of breast cancer, you are at increased risk of developing breast cancer. Arrive at the hospital 15 minutes early to check in, or as directed.

BEFORE YOUR TEST

- Schedule your test about seven days after your menstrual period. This is when your breasts are the least tender and have signs of hormone changes.
- Note that your breasts will have major changes during pregnancy, breastfeeding and menopause.
- If you have had this procedure somewhere else, get the mammogram x-rays or have them sent to this exam facility in order to compare them.

LET YOUR CAREGIVER ABOUT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Breast implants.
- Previous breast disease or surgery.
- Any moles, growths, or scars on your breasts.
- Breastfeeding.
- Allergies.
- Medications taken including herbs, eye drops, over-the-counter medications and creams.
- Hormones.
- Use of steroids (by mouth or creams).
- Previous problems with anesthetics or Novocaine.
- Possibility of pregnancy, if this applies.
- History of blood clots (*thrombophlebitis*).
- History of bleeding or blood problems.
- Other health problems.
- Use of birth control pills.

DURING THE TEST

- You will need to undress from the waist up and put on a gown.
- The mammogram is done by an x-ray technician.
- You stand in front of the x-ray machine.
- Two smooth plastic or glass plates are placed around your breast in different positions with slight pressure and x-rays are taken from different angles of the breast. The same thing is done on the other breast.
- Your breasts will be positioned and compressed with the plates by the technologist. This produces the most complete and useful x-ray images.

Relax as much as possible during the test. Any discomfort during the mammogram will be very brief.

AFTER THE TEST

- You may resume normal activities.
- The mammogram is read by a x-ray specialist (*radiologist*).
- Make an appointment with your caregiver to find out the results. Do not assume everything is normal if you have not heard from your caregiver or the medical facility. It is important for you to follow-up on all of your test results.
- Talk to your caregiver if you do not understand the results of your mammogram and any further treatment or tests that may need to be done, such as:
  - Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), this has no x-rays. A MRI is used to examine internal organs and parts of the body by using a strong magnetic field and radio waves. It is useful when there are thick and heavy breasts or findings on a mammogram that cannot be diagnosed. It is safe to use on pregnant women.
  - Ultrasound uses sound waves to examine internal organs and is helpful to determine if a breast lump is a cyst filled with fluid or a solid tumor. It is safe to use on pregnant women.

- Draining a cyst in the breast.
- Taking a tissue sample (*biopsy*) of a lump in the breast.
- Any kind of surgery on the breast.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Wash your breasts and under your arms the day of the test.
- Do not wear deodorants, perfumes or powders anywhere on your body.
- Wear cloths that you can change in and out of easily.
- Arrive at the facility on time to check in and get prepared for your mammogram.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- There are any changes you find on self-examination that cannot be explained by your caregiver.
- There is any bleeding or discharge from the nipple.
- You find a lump or thickening of the breast or armpit.
- You see the nipple going inward.
- You develop redness, puckering or dimples in the skin of the breast.

RECOMMENDED SCREENING GUIDELINES FOR MAMMOGRAPHY

- By age 40 you should have had your first mammogram.
- At age 40-49 years, repeat every 1 to 2 years or as directed by your caregiver.
- Mammograms should be done yearly after 50 years of age.
- Regular physical exams and self exams are also very important to detecting early problems and should continue.
- Mammography should start at an earlier age if there is a strong family history of breast cancer, or if there are other problems that make a mammogram necessary.

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