Mammography with Breast Implants

Mammography (or mammogram) is a noninvasive procedure that takes an X-ray of your breast. A mammogram can find abnormalities in your breast such as tumors (benign or cancerous) and cysts. However, women with breast implants may have problems during the mammogram. Their implants may interfere with the reading and evaluation of the findings on the X-ray.

It is recommended that a mammogram be done in women:

- Every 1 to 2 years in women who are 40 to 49 years old.
- Every year in women 50 years old and older.
- More often in women with risk factors as recommended by their caregiver.

Women with breast implants should follow the same recommendations given by the National Cancer Institute.

PROBLEMS WITH HAVING A MAMMOGRAM WITH IMPLANTS:

- The implant may rupture during the mammogram.
- Delay in diagnosing breast cancer because the implant can hide or obscure the tumor. A cancer tumor may be missed altogether.
- They may be unable to do a mammogram. One reason may be because scar tissue formed around the implant. When this happens, the breast gets very hard, misshapen and the breast cannot be compressed properly. It may also be too painful to compress the breast adequately to do the mammogram.
- Women may avoid getting a mammogram because they are afraid the implant may rupture or are embarrassed that they have breast implants.
- The implants make it hard to see the actual breast tissue underneath the implant. It is not clear enough to analyze the tissue like it is without breast implants.
- It takes longer to do the mammogram because more X-ray views have to taken.
- It takes longer to read and analyze the X-rays when there are breast implants.

OTHER BREAST SCREENING TESTS

That can be done in women with breast implants, include:

- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). This does not give off radiation and uses intravenous material to make the test more accurate. The MRI can see through the implants to the breast issue and chest muscles. MRI is the best way to detect implant leaks or ruptures. The MRI is used when the mammogram cannot give an accurate reading of the breast.
- Ultrasound. This uses sound waves, not X-rays, and is less expensive. Ultrasound can also detect implant leaks and ruptures.

WHAT WOMEN SHOULD KNOW BEFORE GETTING BREAST IMPLANTS:

- Breast implants have to be replaced every 10 to 15 years.
- They can leak, rupture and cause medical problems.
- There are only two types of implants approved by the FDA: silicone and saline implants.
- Breast biopsies can be done when breast implants are present with a special procedure called vacuum assisted biopsy, if necessary.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Talk to your caregiver or plastic surgeon before getting breast implants.
- Find out the problems that breast implants can cause (see above).
- Ask what benefits you will get having breast implants.
- Continue monthly self breast exams.
- Get your mammogram as recommended by the National Cancer Institute and your caregiver.
- If you have breast implants, inform the X-ray technician and radiologist before getting a mammogram.

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