

Breast services

Having a mammogram

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to give you information about having a mammogram. We hope it will answer some of the questions that you, or those important to you, may have. This leaflet is not meant to replace the consultation between you and your medical team, but aims to help you understand more about what is discussed.

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. X-rays use high energy rays to take a picture of the inside of your body. It is performed by a specially trained radiographer, called a mammographer, and takes place in the outpatient department. Mammographers in NHS breast screening are always women.

Who should not have a mammogram?

To avoid unnecessary radiation exposure, you should not have a mammogram if you:

- have had one within the last six months
- if you are, or think you may be, pregnant
- if you are breastfeeding, as the changes in the breasts make it difficult to interpret the images

During a mammogram, you need to be carefully positioned on the X-ray machine and hold the position for several seconds. For these reasons, it may not be possible for you to have a mammogram if you have limited mobility in your upper body or if you are unable to support your upper body unaided. The mammographer will assess your suitability for having a mammogram at the time of your visit.

Please also tell your mammographer if you have breast implants so that she can adjust the pressure used during the X-ray.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a mammogram?

A mammogram is a quick and safe procedure for identifying breast abnormalities. It does use very small doses of radiation, but the benefit of detecting breast cancer at an early stage outweighs the risk of any problems from the radiation exposure.

What does it involve?

Before your mammogram the mammographer will explain what will happen and answer any questions you may have. You will then be asked to undress from the waist up.

- Please **do** wear separates, such as a top and a skirt, or trousers, to make this easier. You can request a disposable gown but this will still need to be removed for the mammogram to be performed.
- Please **do not** use deodorant or antiperspirant and talcum powder on the day of your appointment or wash them off before the mammogram is taken, as these can affect the quality of the X-ray,

During the mammogram, your breast is compressed between two small flat plates attached to the X-ray machine. The compression is necessary to obtain the best images, but you may find it uncomfortable. Our mammographers are trained to ensure that the minimum pressure is used and is applied for only a few seconds.

A number of X-rays will be taken of your breast from different angles. The number of X-rays taken will depend on your individual circumstances, and you may have one or both breasts X-rayed.

When the mammographer has all the x-rays required, she will let you know and you can get dressed.

How long does it take?

The procedure should take between 5 and 10 minutes.

When will I get my results?

This depends on the clinic you are attending. You may get the results during your appointment, at a subsequent appointment or in the post. A member of staff will be able to advise you.

If you do not hear anything from us about the result within 2 weeks, please contact the breast admin team on 020 3313 0477 between 08:00 and 17:00 Monday to Friday.

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask a member of staff. They will be happy to answer any questions that you may have. It may help to write them down before your appointment so that you have them ready.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact the breast nursing team on **020 3313 0050**, Monday to Friday (except bank holidays) between 09:00 and 17:00. If the nurses are unable to take your call, please leave your contact details and a brief message and they will get back to you within 24 hours.

How do I make a comment about my treatment?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any suggestions or comments about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777**. You can also email PALS at pals@imperial.nhs.uk. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints Department, Fourth Floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk