

What is a Mammogram?

A mammogram is a low-dose x-ray exam of the breasts to look for changes that are abnormal. The results are recorded on x-ray film or directly into a computer for the Radiologist (a specialist doctor) to examine.

A mammogram allows the doctor to have a closer look for changes in breast tissue that cannot be felt during a breast exam. It is used for women who have no breast complaints and for women who have breast symptoms, such as a change in the shape or size of a breast, a lump, nipple discharge, or pain. Breast changes occur in almost all women. In fact, most of these changes are not cancer and are called "benign," but only a doctor can know for sure. Breast changes can also occur monthly, due to your menstrual period.

Diagnostic mammograms are used to check for breast cancer after a lump or other symptom or sign of breast cancer has been found. Signs of breast cancer may include pain, thickened skin on the breast, nipple discharge, or a change in breast size or shape. This type of mammogram also can be used to find out more about breast changes found on a screening mammogram, or to view breast tissue that is hard to see on a screening mammogram. A diagnostic mammogram takes longer than a screening mammogram because it involves more x-rays in order to obtain views of the breast from several angles. The technician can magnify a problem area to make a more detailed picture, which helps the doctor make a correct diagnosis.

Screening mammograms are done for women who have no symptoms of breast cancer. It usually involves two x-rays of each breast. Screening mammograms can detect lumps or tumours that cannot be felt. They can also find microcalcifications or tiny deposits of calcium in the breast, which sometimes mean that breast cancer is present.

How long does a Mammogram take?

Once you are in the room the examination will take approximately 20 minutes, sometimes longer depending on the area that needs to be examined.

You stand in front of a special x-ray machine. The person who takes the x-rays, places your breasts, one at a time, between an x-ray plate and a plastic plate. These plates are attached to the x-ray machine and compress the breasts to flatten them. This spreads the breast tissue out to obtain a clearer picture. You will feel pressure on your breast for a few seconds. It may cause you some discomfort; you might feel squeezed or pinched. This feeling only lasts for a few seconds, and the flatter your breast, the better the picture. Most often, two pictures are taken of each breast — one from the side and one from above.

Who conducts my Mammogram?

A trained radiographer who is accredited with the Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia (MRBPA) will conduct your scan.

Is there any preparation?

- If you are still having menstrual periods, try to avoid making your mammogram appointment during the week before your period. Your breasts will be less tender and swollen. The mammogram will hurt less and the picture will be better.
- If you have breast implants, be sure to tell your mammography facility that you have them when you make your appointment.
- Wear a shirt with shorts, pants, or a skirt. This way, you can undress from the waist up and leave your shorts, pants, or skirt on when you get your mammogram.
- Don't wear any deodorant, perfume, lotion, or powder under your arms or on your breasts on the day of your mammogram appointment. These things can make shadows show up on your mammogram.

What if I'm pregnant?

If you are pregnant, or it is possible that you may be pregnant, then a Mammogram scan is usually not performed unless it is an absolute medical necessity to do so. It is possible that an ultrasound or MRI scan may provide similar information and therefore be used as a substitute. Please inform our clinic if this situation applies to you.

What if I'm on medication?

Mammogram does not affect any medication, so please continue to use any medication prescribed for you.

When do I get the results?

The results of your mammogram can take up to 1 day to be finalised. You will be advised when to pick up your images and report for your follow up with your doctor.

What documents do I need?

Please bring with you your referral and any prior scans and reports as this will assist the radiologist in assessing your condition.

How do I make an appointment?

You can call our clinic directly on 02 9854 0100 to book in an appointment.

