

# Mammography

## What is a mammogram?

Mammograms are an x-ray of your breasts. A very low dose of radiation is used during a mammogram. The key role of mammography is identifying early breast changes. Changes may often be found on mammograms before you or your healthcare provider can feel them. Mammograms detect about 2-3 times as many early breast cancers as physical examination and is considered the “gold standard” in breast cancer detection. While mammography is the best screening technique available today, about one in ten breast cancers will not be identified until they can be felt as lumps. This is why knowing how your breasts normally look and feel and annual clinical breast examination (CBE) by your healthcare provider are so important to assuring breast health.

One of the latest breast health imaging technologies is available at St. Luke's. **Digital mammography** provides radiologists with sharper, clearer images of the breasts. The radiologists can manipulate the breast images for the best view. **Computer aided detection, or CAD**, is also used with digital mammography. With CAD, the mammogram is transferred to a digital image. A computer then scans this image and marks any suspicious looking areas that may not have been visible to the radiologist. The marked areas are reviewed in more detail by the radiologist who then decides if additional imaging is necessary or even biopsy.

*Digital mammography has been in use at St. Luke's Breast & Bone Health since September, 2006 and CAD since 2001.*

## How do I prepare for a mammogram?

First, dress comfortably. A two-piece outfit is usually the easiest because you will undress from the waist up. You should avoid using any type of powders, deodorants, ointments or creams prior to your exam as they could affect the quality and accuracy of the mammogram. *Cleansing and deodorant wipes will be available in your dressing room for use before and after your mammogram.*

You will be asked to remove your clothing from the waist up, but will be given a warm, soft cape to wear. This cape opens in the front allowing the mammographer access to your breasts while still being covered. Your mammographer will explain and perform the procedure and discuss your questions and concerns.

If possible, you should not schedule your mammogram just before or during your menstrual period especially if you have breast pain at that time. Avoiding caffeine products, including chocolate for a week prior to your procedure may decrease breast tenderness making the exam more comfortable to you.

Finally, relax. Being relaxed will make the exam more comfortable for you. The mammogram itself only takes 5-10 minutes and breast compression lasts mere seconds.

## **How do I schedule a mammogram?**

You may call to schedule your appointment yourself, or if you'd rather, your healthcare provider's office may handle this task. *An order from your healthcare provider is required prior to your mammogram.* If your healthcare provider has given you the order, make sure you bring it with you to your appointment. If you had previous mammograms at another facility, make sure you let your scheduler know the name and phone number of that facility or bring this information with you to your appointment. Previous images are important to the radiologist reading your mammogram as the current exam is evaluated and compared to them.

*To schedule your mammogram at St. Luke's Breast & Bone Health, call the Centralized Scheduling department at 319/369-8129.*

## **Where do I come for a mammogram?**

Digital mammograms are offered at 2 locations. The main St. Luke's Breast and Bone Health campus is located the PCI Medical Pavilion, 202 Tenth St. SE, Suite 265. St. Luke's Marion campus is located at 2996 7th Ave. Suite A, Marion, IA. Make a point to arrive about 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment.

## **What can I expect during a mammogram?**

A mammogram usually consists of two views of each breast. One view of the breast is from the side while the other is from the top. During the procedure, each breast will be placed on a platform of the mammogram machine. Your breast will be pressed firmly but briefly between two plates while the x-ray is taken. Most women find the compression somewhat uncomfortable, but not painful, and it only lasts a few seconds. The compression is not harmful to your breast in any way. Adequate compression is necessary for several reasons:

- To decrease radiation dosage.
- To prevent patient motion.
- To increase detail by spreading apart tissues.
- To distinguish between structures of different density, such as fatty tumors and those of high density, such as cysts and cancers.

Your breast images will be done by a specially trained mammography technologist (mammographer). All mammographers at St. Luke's Breast & Bone Health are female. Once the mammograms are completed the radiologist will evaluate them. The findings are sent to your healthcare provider who will notify you of the results.

You will also be notified of the results by the mammography facility.

## Who should I have a mammogram?

The **American Cancer Society** recommends yearly mammograms for women starting at age 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health. Talk with your healthcare provider about your history and whether you should have additional tests at an earlier age due to family history, a genetic tendency or other risk factors.

x:\word\shared\wmscare\mamm\what is mammography  
Updated: 9/20121