

## **A mammogram is a low-dose x-ray that creates an image of the breast. It has been the standard method used to screen women for breast cancer for over 35 years.**

### **Why should I have a Mammogram?**

Mammograms can detect lumps or tumors in the breast that cannot be felt. They can also detect other changes in the breast such as microcalcifications (tiny deposits of calcium in the breast) that may indicate the presence of breast cancer.

### **What is screening Mammogram?**

Screening mammograms detect breast changes in women who have no signs or symptoms of breast cancer. It usually involves two x-rays of each breast.

### **What is a diagnostic Mammogram?**

This is a more detailed breast x-ray which is taken if an abnormality has been observed on a screening mammogram or if a person has signs and symptoms of breast cancer that a doctor wishes to investigate. It involves multiple images of the breasts.

### **When should I have a Mammogram?**

It is recommended that beginning at age 40, all women should have a mammogram every two years or on a more frequent basis if recommended by their physician.

In addition, women who are deemed to be at higher than average risk, e.g. because of a family history of breast cancer, should consult with their doctor as to when they should begin having mammograms and also as to the frequency of having a mammogram.

### **What are the benefits?**

Screening mammograms can detect lumps and some other breast abnormalities before they can be felt. They have been effective in reducing the number of deaths from breast cancer especially in women between the ages of 40 - 69.

### **What are the limitations of Mammography?**

There is no screening test that is 100% effective at detecting cancer. False negatives can occur - this means that a mammogram may not detect a tumor when there is in fact a tumor present. False positives can occur - this means that a mammogram is thought to be abnormal e.g. that cancer might be present when in fact there is no cancer present. Finding a cancer by mammography does not mean that the doctors can save your life. This is especially true if the tumor is discovered at an advanced stage or if a woman's cancer is aggressive and rapid-growing in nature.

### **How else can I detect breast cancer?**

You should do a monthly breast self exam (BSE) and learn the 'neighborhoods' of your breasts - different parts of your breast will feel different and they will feel different depending on the time of the month. Do your BSE at the same time each month and learn what is normal for you. Remember BSE involves not just feeling for change but also looking for change in the size, shape or appearance of your breasts.

In addition all women should have an annual clinical breast exam (CBE). This is similar to BSE but is performed by a doctor or nurse. Be sure to tell him/her of any changes you may have noticed or problems you may be having with your breasts.

### **How should I prepare for a Mammogram?**

- On the day of your mammogram do not wear deodorant, perfume, lotion, talcum powder etc - this can interfere with the quality of the image.
- Do not wear any jewelry.
- Wear a two piece outfit so that you only have to remove your blouse and bra.
- Avoid scheduling your mammogram the week before your period. Your breasts are likely to be more tender at this time and will make the mammogram a more painful experience.

### **What is the best time to schedule a mammogram?**

If you still have a monthly period the best time to schedule your mammogram is the week after your period.

### **What happens during a Mammogram?**

- When you go for a mammogram you are asked to undress from your waist up. You will be given a gown to wear.
- The person taking the mammogram and you will be the only people in the room. The person performing the mammogram is a medical professional.
- Tell the person taking the mammogram images of any problems you are currently having or have had in the past with your breasts.
- The person taking the x-ray will help you place one breast on a plastic plate. Another plastic plate will be lowered on top of your breast to squeeze or compress your breast so as to spread the tissue apart. This ensures that there is little movement and a sharper image. You may feel some discomfort during the compression phase but it usually only lasts for a few seconds. This process is usually repeated twice on each breast for a screening mammogram.

### **What is a Digital Mammogram?**

Digital mammography is an x-ray of the breast and follows the same procedures as for conventional analog mammography including the time needed to position the breast, compression of the breast and the use of radiation.

### **What's the difference between digital and conventional mammography?**

Conventional mammography stores the image on film, like a traditional film camera which you have to take to a photography store to be developed.

Digital mammography takes a picture electronically and stores the images on a computer just as how you would take a photograph with a digital camera. The digital image can be enhanced, magnified etc. just as you do with your digital photographs at home. As a result, the digital image is available much quicker than an analog image - seconds compared to minutes.

### Is digital mammography better?

Digital mammography is as effective as traditional mammography at detecting breast cancer in the general population of women. It may be more effective for women:

- With dense breasts
- Who are pre or pre-menopausal
- Who are younger than 50.

### What are the advantages?

- Consultations with overseas doctors will be possible as the images can be transmitted electronically just as when you send a photograph as an email attachment to a friend.
- You can request a copy of your mammogram on CD if you need a copy e.g. if traveling to a doctor overseas.
- Subtle differences between abnormal and normal tissue may be detected more easily.
- The number of follow-up procedures needed may be fewer.
- Fewer repeat images may be needed, reducing exposure to radiation.
- The overall time for the procedure is less.

### What is CAD?

CAD or computer-aided detection is a computer software that assists the film reader (radiologist) in identifying abnormalities on a mammogram. This is done by placing prompts over areas of concern alerting the radiologist to re-examine that area of the image and if necessary seek a second opinion or perform a more detailed image.

### What else should I think about?

- If you have had an analog mammogram done before ask the center where you had the procedure done for a copy of your films. These can be scanned using a special scanner and software so that the old images can be compared to the new digital images.
- If you have had a digital mammogram done in past at a different centre, ask them for a copy of your mammogram on a CD so that it can be compared with the new images.
- Be sure to ask when you and/or your doctor will receive the results of the mammogram.
- If you do not receive the results be sure to follow-up with your doctor. Do NOT assume that everything is okay because you haven't heard from him/her with the results.

### What if I think I'm pregnant?

Inform the person taking the mammogram prior to the x-ray procedure.

### What if I have breast implants?

Inform the person taking the mammogram prior to the x-ray procedure.

### Where can I get a mammogram?

There are three places to get a mammogram in the Cayman Islands.

The Cayman Islands Hospital 244-2880

Chrissie Tomlinson Memorial Hospital 949-6066

Medlab 49-7331

At the time of printing the average cost of a mammogram in the Cayman Islands is \$150.

### What if I can't afford a mammogram?

If you do not have an insurance plan that covers the cost of a mammogram you may contact a member of the Lions Club of Tropical Gardens for a voucher for a free mammogram. Alternatively, you may contact the Cayman Islands Cancer Society which acts as an issuer of vouchers for the Lions Club of Tropical Gardens.

### Contact us

For more information on our programs and the Cayman Islands Cancer Society, we invite you to stop by and visit us between the hours of 8am and 5pm Monday thru Friday.

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