Breast Cancer Screening for Ages 50 to 74

Who should get a mammogram and how often?

Mammography is still the only screening test proven to save lives by finding breast cancer early.

If you're:

- Ages 50 to 74, you should have a mammogram every 1 to 2 years (unless both of your breasts have been removed).
- Older than 74, routine mammogram screening isn't recommended and reminders for routine screening stop. This is because there are no randomized control studies on the risks and benefits of mammogram screening for patients ages 75 and older. Talk with your doctor if you'd like to continue mammogram screening after age 75.

If you're a transgender individual, discuss your breast cancer screening needs with your doctor.

Do I need a mammogram even if I'm feeling well and have no symptoms?

Yes. Early breast cancer and precancer usually have no symptoms. Breast cancer can be so small that it's hard to feel. That's why screening is important. You may feel completely healthy during early stages when cancer is easier to treat.

What can I expect during my mammogram?

At your screening, you'll be asked to undress from the waist up and wear a hospital gown. During the exam, a technologist will position your breast between 2 plates for a few seconds. The plates will take different images (X-rays) of the inside of your breasts. The whole process takes about 20 minutes.

How do I prepare for my mammogram?

Don't wear deodorant, talcum powder, lotion, or perfume under your arms on the day of your appointment. If you've had a mammogram somewhere other than Kaiser Permanente, please have the images sent to us or bring them with you.

What can I do to improve my experience?

Getting a mammogram can be uncomfortable. You can do some things to make it more comfortable. For example, if you typically have sore breasts around your monthly period, schedule your mammogram when they're likely to be less tender.

How common is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer for women in the U.S., affecting 1 in 8 women. But the survival rate is very high, especially when mammogram screening detects breast cancer early.

How do I know if my risk is high?

Your risk for breast cancer may be higher if you have any of these factors:

- Personal history of breast cancer, or a prior biopsy showing precancer cells.
  - First-degree relative (mother, daughter, or sister) had breast or ovarian cancer.
  - Second-degree relative (aunt, niece, grandmother, granddaughter) had breast cancer before age 50 or ovarian cancer at any age.
- You or a first-degree relative tested positive for a gene that increases breast cancer risk.
- Male breast cancer in your family.
- Chest radiation therapy.

If you have any risk factors, talk with your doctor. You may need mammogram screening more frequently. If you notice any changes in your breasts, call the Appointment and Advice Call Center at 866-454-8855 to make an appointment with your doctor, or make one online.

How can I lower my risk?

You may be able to lower your breast cancer risk with these lifestyle choices:

- Get moderate exercise, such as brisk walking. Aim for 2½ hours (total) a week.
- Stay at a healthy weight (or lose weight if needed).
- Eat healthy. Get plenty of high-fiber foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes (beans and peas).
- Limit alcohol use to 1 drink a day, if you drink.
- Stop smoking or vaping, if you do.
- Breastfeed your baby, if possible.
- Limit use of hormone therapy (HT) to relieve menopausal symptoms to 3 to 5 years (or less), if you decide to use hormone therapy.

How much does a mammogram cost?

At Kaiser Permanente, mammograms are usually provided without a copay, as a preventive care procedure. To learn what preventive services are covered by your health plan, call our Member Services Contact Center at 800-464-4000. Or review your Evidence of Coverage (EOC) or Certificate of Insurance.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.

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011061-398 (Revised 08/23) RL 6.9