

Breast cancer screening tests

Screening tests are used to find breast cancer before it causes any signs or symptoms.

Regular screening tests (along with follow-up tests and treatment, if diagnosed) can help lower the chance of dying from breast cancer.

- A **screening mammogram** uses X-rays to take pictures of the breast. It can find breast cancer early, before a lump can be felt. It's the best screening test used today to find breast cancer in most women.
- A **clinical breast exam** is done by a trained doctor or nurse. They check your breasts and underarm areas for any lumps or changes. It's often part of your well-woman exam.
- **Breast MRI** uses magnetic fields to make detailed pictures of the breast. Breast MRI is part of screening for some women at higher risk of breast cancer (such as those with a **BRCA1/2 inherited gene mutation**). It's not recommended for screening women at average risk of breast cancer.

Talk with your doctor about your risk of breast cancer and create a screening plan that's best for you. There are specific recommendations for:

- **Women at average risk.**
- **Women at higher risk.**
- **Transgender people.**
- **Men at higher risk.**

Other tools are under study to learn whether they may play a role in breast cancer screening for all women or certain groups at higher risk.

What are the possible findings on a mammogram?

A screening mammogram may show:

- No signs of breast cancer.
- A **benign** (not cancerous) condition.



- An abnormal finding, such as **calcifications**, that needs follow-up tests to rule out cancer.
- If you have **dense breasts**.
 - All mammography centers in the U.S. now have to notify women about their breast density after getting a mammogram. Talk with your doctor about your risk of breast cancer and what screening plan is best for you.

Follow-up tests

Follow-up tests may be needed if a screening test finds something abnormal or if you or your doctor find a lump or other change in your breast or underarm area.

- A **diagnostic mammogram** is like a screening mammogram, but more pictures are taken to get a better look at the area of concern. Although it's called a "diagnostic" mammogram, it can't diagnose breast cancer. However, it can show whether the finding looks like breast cancer.
- A **breast ultrasound** uses sound waves to make images of the breast. It can show the difference between a liquid-filled cyst and a solid mass (which may or may not be cancer). Breast ultrasound is not a good screening test on its own.
- In some cases, a **breast MRI** may also be used as a follow-up test to check an abnormal finding.

If a follow-up test suggests breast cancer, a breast **biopsy** is done. A biopsy removes cells or tissue to check for cancer. It's the only test that can diagnose or confirm breast cancer.

This fact sheet is intended to be a brief overview. For more information, visit [komen.org](https://www.komen.org) or call the Komen Patient Care Center's Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET and Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET or email at helpline@komen.org. Se habla español.

BREAST CANCER SCREENING and Follow-Up Tests

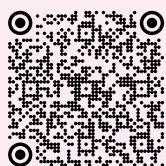
Resources

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)
komen.org

Related online resources:

- Breast Density
- Benign Breast Conditions in Women
- Breast Self-Awareness Messages
- If You Find a Breast Lump or Change
- Questions to Ask Your Doctor: If You Find a Lump or Change in Your Breast
- Questions to Ask Your Doctor: Screening Mammograms
- Risk-Lowering Options for Women at Higher Risk of Breast Cancer

Resources are available in Spanish.



Please answer a few questions about this resource to better help us serve you. We'd love to hear your thoughts. Simply scan the QR code to **share your feedback before December 31, 2026.**

Know what is normal for you

The signs of breast cancer are not the same for everyone. It's important to know how your breasts normally look and feel.

Breast tissue often has a bumpy texture. Lumps that feel harder or different than the rest of the breast (or the other breast) or that feel like a change should be checked. If you feel or see any change in your breasts or underarms, see a doctor. If you're not sure, it's best to get checked!

Questions to ask your doctor

1. Am I at a higher risk of breast cancer? How do you know?
2. When should I get a screening mammogram? Do you recommend other tests for me?
3. How often should I get a screening mammogram?
4. What are the pros and cons of screening mammograms?
5. Where can I get a screening mammogram?
6. What if I can't afford a screening mammogram?
7. If the mammogram shows I have dense breasts, what do I do?

If you are asked to come back for a follow-up test:

1. What kind of test will I have?
2. Why do I need this test?
3. How accurate is the test?
4. When and how will I get the results?
5. If a problem is found, what are the next steps?

Don't ignore the warning signs:

- Lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast or underarm area



- Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast



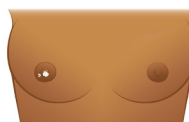
- Change in the size or shape of the breast



- Dimpling or puckering of the skin



- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple



- Pulling in of your nipple or other parts of the breast



- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly



- New pain in one spot that does not go away



For more information, visit the **Breast Cancer Screening & Early Detection** section on komen.org.

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