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The Importance of Screening Mammography



From: Dr. Ross Golding, MD

Women often ask, “What is my risk of getting breast cancer?”

Well, here’s the bad news: One out of every ten women will develop breast cancer at some point in their lives.

There are some risk factors that you can control and some that you can’t.

Lifestyle Factors That Increase Risk:

- Drinking alcohol--Consuming more than one drink a day increases the risk of breast cancer.
- Obesity or being overweight.

Lifestyle Factors That Lower Risk:

- Regular exercise and physical activity.
- Bearing children before the age of 30.

Risk Factors Beyond Your Control:

- Being Female—Men get breast cancer too, but the disease is unfortunately about one thousand times more common in women.
- Age—Cancer risk increases with age.
- Genetic Factors—5% to 10% of breast cancers are hereditary. If you have a strong family history of breast or ovarian cancer, we recommend you discuss your personal risk with a genetic counselor or your physician.
- Breast Density—Women’s breasts are composed of both fat and glandular tissue. Most women’s breasts consist of predominately fatty tissue, but 40% of women have dense or glandular-type breasts. Not only do women with dense breasts have a higher risk of breast cancer, it is also more difficult for a screening mammogram to detect the presence of cancer in these women.

But don’t despair. There is some good news! Advances in technology now allow radiologists to detect breast cancer in its earliest stages. And a mammogram, or low-dose X-ray of the breast, is the mainstay for early detection. In fact, the American Cancer Society recommends that women should begin yearly mammograms by age 45 and should be given the choice to start as early as age 40 if they want.

Unfortunately, simple screening mammograms don’t always detect cancer in dense breasts and advances in technology have allowed us to improve our ability to detect cancer earlier. Outlined below are the various tests we run for breast cancer, starting with the simplest and moving to the most complex.

To schedule a mammogram at Reno Diagnostic Centers, call 775-323-5083.

- **Screening Mammogram** — This is a simple 2D conventional exam that takes about ten-minutes for women with no breast symptoms (ex. breast pain, lumps, discharge, etc.). Two images of each breast are obtained and interpreted by a radiologist.
- **3D (Tomosynthesis) Mammogram** — This is a 3D tomographic mammogram. This FDA approved exam allows the radiologist to better evaluate the breast millimeter by millimeter, eliminating the problem of overlapping breast tissues, which can obstruct breast cancer detection. This exam can increase breast cancer detection by 40% and reduces the times patients may have to come back for additional views by 50%.
- **Diagnostic Mammogram** — This is a longer and more thorough examination of the breasts. When a screening mammogram shows abnormalities, then we’ll move to the diagnostic level. However, if a patient is exhibiting breast symptoms, including pain or a palpable lump, then we’ll jump right to a diagnostic mammogram.
- **Diagnostic Breast Ultrasound** — Like any other ultrasound, this test uses high-frequency sound waves to produce images of the inside of the body. When a woman has palpable lumps or dense breasts, we will often take an ultrasound of the breast to complement the diagnostic mammogram. This gives us a more complete picture of what is going on inside.
- **Whole Breast Ultrasound (WBUS)** — Uses ultrasound as an automated method to scan the whole breast. This is a very effective tool to screen for cancer for women with dense breast tissue.
- **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) of the Breast** — This is the most complex and time-consuming of the

tests. A breast MRI is most often performed after a woman has already been diagnosed with breast cancer in order to determine the extent of the disease. However, for women with a high genetic risk of cancer, an MRI can be used in conjunction with both a diagnostic mammogram and an ultrasound to provide a comprehensive screening. Taken together, these three tests can detect cancer at its absolute earliest stages.

The various tests and appropriateness can be somewhat overwhelming. Just remember that your radiologist is an expert in breast cancer detection and imaging. At Reno Diagnostic Centers, we have skilled radiologists and technologists to guide you through the process. We are always happy to meet with you to discuss your concerns and answer any questions.

Here’s the bottom line: if you are at all concerned about breast cancer, please get a mammogram. Don’t let cost or lack of insurance deter you. At RDC, we offer free screening mammograms for women that meet the screening criteria and do not have insurance. In fact, in the month of May, RDC is hosting Free Mammo Mondays for women without medical insurance to help raise awareness of the importance of regular screening mammograms.

Working together, we can catch cancer early and take steps to beat it. And that’s the best news! When diagnosed early and countered with effective treatments, breast cancer is a curable disease.



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