

CANCER EXPLAINED PRESENTS

A FREE HEALTH HANDOUT

BREAST CANCER SCREENING

When to start mammograms, and what to ask

FREE TO PRINT · PLAIN LANGUAGE · SOURCES ON THE BACK

A CANCER EXPLAINED HANDOUT · BASED ON **USPSTF · ACS · CDC · FDA** · UPDATED **2026-11-10**

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Breast Cancer Screening

When to start mammograms, and what to ask

cancer explained.org

1 For women at average risk

- ☐ U.S. Preventive Services Task Force: a mammogram every 2 years from age 40 to 74.
- ☐ American Cancer Society: the choice to start yearly at 40 to 44, yearly from 45 to 54, then every 2 years or yearly from 55.
- ☐ The two guidelines differ a little. Ask your doctor which schedule fits you.

2 You may need a different plan if

- ☐ A parent, sister, brother, or child had breast or ovarian cancer.
- ☐ You carry a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene change, or a close relative does.
- ☐ You had radiation to the chest when you were young.
- ☐ Tell your doctor. Screening may start earlier or include a breast MRI.

3 About the test

- ☐ A mammogram is a low-dose x-ray of each breast. The pressure lasts a few seconds.
- ☐ Being called back for more pictures is common, and most call-backs are not cancer.
- ☐ Your results letter will say whether your breasts are dense. Dense tissue can make cancer harder to see, so ask what it means for you.

4 Do not wait for a screening date if you notice

- ☐ A new lump in the breast or underarm.
- ☐ Skin that dimples, thickens, or turns red or flaky.
- ☐ A nipple that turns inward, or discharge other than breast milk.
- ☐ A change in the size or shape of a breast.

5 My screening

Date of my last mammogram: _____

My next one is due: _____

THE BOTTOM LINE

From 40, ask your doctor when to start mammograms and how often. Report any breast change at any age.

Sources: USPSTF: Breast cancer screening (uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/recommendation/breast-cancer-screening) · ACS: Breast cancer screening guideline (cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer/screening-tests-and-early-detection/american-cancer-society-recommendations-for-the-early-detection-of-breast-cancer.html) · CDC: Symptoms of breast cancer (cdc.gov/breast-cancer/symptoms/index.html) · FDA: Mammography breast density reporting rule (fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-updates-mammography-regulations-require-reporting-breast-density-information-and-enhance)

Learn more in plain language: cancerexplained.org/essentials/breast-cancer · **Updated:** 2026-11-10

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