



FAQS: A BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSIS

WHAT DOES A BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSIS MEAN?

A diagnosis means that abnormal cells in the breast have been identified as cancerous. It does **not always indicate advanced cancer**, early detection through screening improves treatment options and outcomes.

HOW IS BREAST CANCER STAGED?

Staging describes the size of the tumor and whether it has spread. Your healthcare team will explain your stage and what it means for treatment planning.

WHAT TREATMENT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

TREATMENT DEPENDS ON THE TYPE AND STAGE OF CANCER AND MAY INCLUDE:

- Surgery
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Hormone therapy or targeted therapy
- Your doctor will recommend a personalized plan.

WILL I NEED ADDITIONAL TESTS?

Yes. After a diagnosis, your provider may order imaging or biopsies to gather more information about the cancer. These tests **help guide treatment**, but do not always mean the cancer is worse.

Work with your doctor to review your plan and make decisions that are right for you.

WHERE CAN I FIND SUPPORT AND RESOURCES?

IBCCP or other local programs may help with screenings, follow-up care, and financial assistance. Hospitals, community organizations, and cancer support groups provide counseling, peer support, and guidance.

HOW QUICKLY SHOULD TREATMENT BEGIN?

REACH OUT TO A CHW FOR SUPPORT AND NAVIGATION.

Treatment typically starts **as soon as possible**, but the timing may depend on additional tests, consultations with specialists, and personal circumstances. Your healthcare team will help you plan the best schedule.

HOW CAN I INVOLVE MY FAMILY OR CAREGIVERS?

Family and caregivers can help by:

- Attending appointments with you
- Keeping track of medical information and medications
- Offering emotional and practical support
- Asking questions you may not think of during appointments

FAQS: BREAST MRI PART 1

Breast MRI – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

WHAT IS A BREAST MRI?

A breast MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) uses radio waves and strong magnets to create detailed pictures of the inside of the breast. It provides cross-sectional images from many angles and shows soft tissues that may not be as clear on other imaging tests.

HOW IS A BREAST MRI DIFFERENT FROM A MAMMOGRAM?

Although both are specialized breast imaging tests, they use different technology. Mammograms use x-rays, while MRI uses strong magnets and radio waves. MRI also requires special equipment, including a dedicated breast coil, which not all facilities have.

YOUR MEDICAL PROVIDER WILL LET YOU KNOW IF A BREAST MRI IS NEEDED.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE A BREAST MRI AT A FACILITY WITH DEDICATED EQUIPMENT?

If you are having a breast MRI, it's important to choose a facility that can perform MRI-guided breast biopsies if needed—or one that partners with a center that can.

Not all hospitals and imaging centers have dedicated breast MRI equipment.

WHY DO I NEED CONTRAST DYE FOR A BREAST MRI?

The MRI creates pictures of soft tissue parts of the body that are sometimes hard to see using other imaging tests. Before the test, contrast dye is injected into a vein through an IV. This helps highlight abnormal areas in the breast, making them easier for radiologists to see.

REACH OUT TO A CHW WHO CAN HELP IDENTIFY A SPECIALIZED CENTER NEAR YOU.

WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE THE BREAST MRI?

You will be asked to undress and wear a gown or clothing without metal. You must remove metal objects such as jewelry, hair clips, body piercings, and any removable dental work. The technologist will ask about metal inside your body, as some metal implants can interfere with the scan.

FAQS: BREAST MRI PART 2

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT DURING THE BREAST MRI?

You will have to take off your clothing and wear a special gown.

You'll lie face-down on a narrow table with your breasts positioned in an opening so they can hang freely without compression. Your arms will rest above your head. The table slides into a long, narrow tube where the images are taken.

The test is painless, but you'll need to stay very still. The machine makes loud thumping, clicking, and whirring noises, and you may receive earplugs or headphones to help block the sound.

HOW LONG DOES THE TEST TAKE?

A breast MRI typically takes **30 to 45 minutes**. Each set of images lasts a few minutes. You may be asked to wait afterward while the technologist checks if additional images are needed.

WHAT IF I'M UNCOMFORTABLE IN TIGHT SPACES?

Most breast MRIs are done inside a narrow tube. If you are worried or concerned about being in a tight space for at least **30 minutes**, talk with your doctor. Your doctor may be able to help you feel more comfortable by giving you medicine to help you relax. You can also ask to tour the machine before your appointment.

On the day of your appointment, the technologist will be there with you every step of the way and their role is to comfort you and help you get the care you need.

WHERE ARE BREAST MRIS PERFORMED?

They are usually done in outpatient hospital departments or imaging clinics. Because contrast is used, an IV line will be placed in your arm before the scan.

WHEN WILL I GET MY RESULTS?

Breast MRI results are typically available within **1 to 3 business days**, after a radiologist reviews the images and sends a report to your healthcare provider.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY RESULTS SHOW SOMETHING UNUSUAL?

Additional testing may be needed to better understand what was seen. This does not necessarily mean you have cancer.

Often, your provider simply wants more information about an area that looked different.

FAQS: MAMMOGRAMS PART 1

Mammogram FAQs

WHAT IS A MAMMOGRAM?

A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast that's used to find breast changes.

It is performed with a machine designed specifically to examine breast tissue.

HOW MUCH RADIATION DOES A MAMMOGRAM USE?

Mammogram machines use lower doses of radiation than the x-rays done to look at other parts of the body.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO SCHEDULE A MAMMOGRAM?

It's best to schedule your mammogram about one week after your menstrual period, when your breasts are less tender or swollen. This usually means less discomfort during the test.

HOW SHOULD I PREPARE ON THE DAY OF MY MAMMOGRAM?

Wear a **2-piece outfit**, because you will need to remove your top and bra.

You will be given a special gown.

Do not use deodorant, antiperspirant, powder, lotion, or ointment under your arms or on your chest. These products can appear as white spots on the x-ray.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A MAMMOGRAM?

The entire process takes about **20 minutes**.

Your breast is compressed between two plastic plates for a **few seconds** while an x-ray is taken. The plates are then repositioned to take additional views. The process is repeated for the other breast. Compression may be uncomfortable, but it is necessary to produce the clearest images.

FAQS: MAMMOGRAMS PART 2

WHEN WILL I RECEIVE MY RESULTS?

You should get your mammogram **results within 10 days**. If you don't, call your healthcare provider to ask about them.

WHAT IS DENSE BREAST TISSUE, AND WILL MY REPORT MENTION IT?

Yes—your mammogram report will state whether you have dense breast tissue.

Talk with your healthcare provider about what that may mean for you.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY PROVIDER SEES SOMETHING UNUSUAL?

You may need new x-rays or other tests. This does not mean you have cancer.

Sometimes an area simply looks different, or the original images weren't clear and need to be repeated.

WHAT IF MY SCREENING MAMMOGRAM IS NEGATIVE?

If your results are negative, continue following your recommended screening schedule.

Also talk with your healthcare provider about monthly self-breast exams, which can help you become familiar with how your breasts normally feel.

Community Health Workers are available to help you navigate every step of the journey!