**Screening Mammograms: The Benefits and Risks**

Screening mammograms have *many* benefits but they are not risk free. Talk with your healthcare provider about when and how often you should have a screening mammogram.

# Benefits of Mammograms:

* The best way to find cancers that cannot be felt or seen without x-rays.
* Finds cancers early which means treatment can begin earlier which means a better chance of a cure.
* Helps reduce the number of breast cancer deaths among 40-74 year old women.

# Risks of Mammograms:

* **False-positive results -** This happens when the mammogram shows something abnormal that *could* be cancer, but after more tests are done, is found *not* to be cancer. The extra tests that are done to rule out cancer can cause the patient unnecessary anxiety, discomfort, and/or extra medical bills.
* **Overdiagnosis and overtreatment** sometimes happens when cancers or even certain conditions that *may* become cancerous are treated when they don’t need to be. Not all pre-cancers or cancers will cause illness and/or death but since doctors usually can’t tell the difference between the two, they are all treated.
* **False-negative results** occur when a mammogram appears to be normal (a negative result) even though there really *is* a breast cancer present. This can lead to delays in treatment and a false sense of security.
* **False sense of security** is given when a fast- growing breast cancer develops soon after a normal screening mammogram. This is different from a false-negative because, at the time, the results were correct; the cancer really wasn’t there when the mammogram was done. Now, however, the women with cancer incorrectly believes that she doesn’t have cancer, and treatment will be delayed.
* **Radiation exposure** is small with a single mammogram. However, repeated mammograms over the years, increase the risk of cancer from radiation exposure more than a single mammogram would. Although the potential benefits of mammography nearly always outweigh the potential harm from the radiation exposure, you should talk with your healthcare provider about the need for each additional x-ray. If you are pregnant, you should let your healthcare provider know because radiation can harm a growing fetus.

Remember mammograms can’t prevent breast cancer, but they can help find cancer early, offering a better chance of a cure. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider if you have any questions about mammograms.

**EARLY DETECTION SAVES LIVES!**

Resource: *National Cancer Institute,* [*https://www.cancer.gov/types/breast/mammograms-fact-sheet/*](https://www.cancer.gov/types/breast/mammograms-fact-sheet/) *Form WH-01A*

*7/2018*