

# Breast Imaging

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## Introduction

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Whilst breast cancer may at some time affect between 1 in 10 to 1 in 15 women (less commonly men), early detection has been shown to prevent many deaths.

Those patients with a family history of breast cancer, or patients with symptoms of breast disease eg., lump or pain in the breast, discharge from the nipple etc., should be investigated by the appropriate expert.

## Procedures

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### MAMMOGRAPHY

Mammography (breast x-ray) using a special x-ray machine is very good at finding breast cancer at an early stage, often before there are any symptoms or signs of disease. Such a discovery often allows curative treatment without the need for removal of the whole breast.

Modern equipment uses relatively small x-ray doses and the potential benefit far outweighs any conceivable side effect. For the best mammogram pictures it is necessary to compress (squeeze) the breast as flat as possible. Some patients find this uncomfortable but it is essential to obtain clear films. The compression is only applied for a short time and both breasts can usually be examined in about 15 minutes.

Dusting (talcum) powder or deodorant should not be applied to the breast or armpit on the day of the examination as it causes false appearances on the films. Some patients may experience discomfort for a day or so after the examination.

On completion the films will be studied in detail by the radiologist who will report on the findings for your referring doctor. You should make an appointment to discuss the findings with your doctor.

### ULTRASOUND SCANNING

Scanning of the breast with ultrasound (high energy sound waves) gives very good pictures of lumps your doctor can feel in the breast and may better characterise a possible abnormality seen at mammography.

In many patients under 35 years of age ultrasound scanning should be the initial test performed and may be sufficient for an accurate diagnosis. A Medicare rebate is available for ultrasound examination.

### MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING (MRI)

For patients with silicone implants and where leakage is suspected, MRI is recommended. Unfortunately the government allows no Medicare rebate for this test in private practice.

### DUCTOGRAPHY

This is occasionally needed where patients have bleeding or discharge from the nipple. A painless injection of an iodine-containing compound is made into the discharging duct. Mammogram films are then taken to reveal the inside lining of the duct.

## Keeping films

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All x-ray films should be kept so that these may be compared with each new examination. It is often a minor change in the appearance that leads to correct and early diagnosis.

## Charges

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A Medicare rebate is payable for patients who have symptoms of breast cancer or who have a family history of breast cancer. For patients with a family history, some experts advise mammography examinations should commence at 35 years of age and be repeated at annual intervals. For women over 40, mammography has been shown to improve the outcome of breast cancer.

## Remember

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While breast x-rays detect most breast cancers, they do not find all of them. It is important that you examine your own breasts every month and have regular breast checks with your doctor.

If you find a lump in your breast or notice any other changes, you should contact your doctor without delay.

**Please bring any previous x-rays with you on the day of your examination.**