



Mammography

What you need to know

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What is Mammography?

Mammography is a low dose X-ray examination of the breasts used for the early detection of breast cancer and for the evaluation of breast lumps.

What can it show?

A mammogram can show changes in your breasts before you or your doctor can detect an abnormality. Sometimes additional mammography views and/or ultrasound are necessary for full evaluation. This will indicate whether any further tests are required to exclude cancer. It is also used to investigate breast lumps found by you or your doctor. Most of these turn out to be benign such as simple fluid-filled cysts. Ultrasound is often used as a supplementary examination to mammography. Ultrasound of the breasts is painless and involves placing gel on the skin and examining with an ultrasound transducer.



Breast Cancer in New Zealand

Breast Cancer is the most common cancer in New Zealand women, apart from skin cancer. About 1 in 8 women will develop breast cancer during their lifetime. At present we know little about preventing breast cancer. Generally, if a cancer is found while it is small, there is a better chance that treatment will be successful.

Early detection of breast cancer

Early detection is your best insurance for a cure for breast cancer. The chances of developing breast cancer increases with age with a peak in the late 50s. Regular screening mammography is recommended at an interval of not more than two years and will often be recommended yearly in women who have had previous breast cancer, those with a strong family history, women with dense breasts and in certain age groups. Publicly funded screening mammography will screen women every two years between the ages of 45–69 years. Patients outside this age range may also obtain private mammography screening. Currently an age extension to 74 years is being reviewed.

Is it accurate?

Mammography is the most accurate population screening method of detecting a breast cancer while the tumour is still small. Mammography can detect a tumour before it can be felt and the examination detects approximately 9 out of 10 cancers. Early detection of cancers will mean that biopsy may be undertaken on some abnormalities that will turn out not to be cancers.

Is it safe?

As with any X-ray, radiation is involved. However, by using our highly specialised modern equipment the radiation dose is minimal and the examination is considered safe.





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