

# Having a regular mammogram with Canterbury Breastcare could save your life



## What is a mammogram?

A Mammogram is a special breast X-ray which shows the glands, fat and blood vessels of the breast.

There are two reasons for having a mammogram, **Screening** and as part of **Diagnostic Breast Imaging**.

## Screening

Screening means looking for possible breast cancer when you have no signs or symptoms of breast disease.

Mammography can detect tiny changes in your breasts which you may not have noticed. These changes may be due to cancer and may be smaller than a grain of rice. Early detection and treatment of small cancers greatly increases your chances of cure.

- About 1 woman in 10 will develop breast cancer at some time in her life.
- The risk of breast cancer increases with age, 70% of breast cancers occur in women over 50.

The benefits of screening mammography have been proven in large international trials.

Yearly mammography is recommended for women 40-50 years of age. Women over the age of 50 years should have screening mammography every two years.

It may be appropriate that women with a family history of breast cancer start mammography at an earlier age, or have annual mammography.

## Diagnostic Breast Imaging

Diagnostic Breast Imaging means looking at something in your breast that is worrying you or your doctor.

This includes

- A thickening or a lump
- Skin dimpling or ulceration
- Nipple discharge
- Persistent nipple rash
- Non cyclical or focal pain

Most of these changes will not be due to cancer, but you should see your doctor as soon as possible to arrange the necessary tests.

This type of mammogram can be done at any age but ultrasound may be performed first in women under thirty five years of age.

Even though your mammogram is normal your doctor may send you for further tests e.g. biopsy or aspiration. If appropriate, this is arranged at the same visit.

## Are there any risks?

The X-ray process involves some exposure to radiation, however with modern equipment your exposure is very low.

The benefits of finding and treating a breast cancer early far outweighs any risk from the X-ray itself.

## What happens when I have a Mammogram?

You will be asked to undress from the waist up. Please wear a skirt or trousers if possible.

Each breast is examined separately. A female radiographer (a technologist who is an expert in the use of x-ray equipment) will palpate your breast then carefully position your breasts on the X-ray machine. This has compression plates that flatten the breast tissue allowing the best images to be taken. You stand for the X-rays which only take a few minutes.

The test may be uncomfortable, but is usually not painful.

Usually two views of each breast are taken - one looking from above and the other from the side.

Sometimes further X-rays are needed to show an area of the breast more clearly.

Don't be concerned if this occurs. Ultrasound may also be necessary to complete your examination. For this a small amount of warmed gel is placed on your breast and a probe is held against the skin.

This is very similar to a pregnancy ultrasound examination and is painless and safe.

Ultrasound is particularly useful in detecting cysts and evaluating breast lumps in younger women.

## Your results

At Canterbury Breastcare, your images will be looked at by at least two radiologists (doctors specialising in medical diagnosis using X-rays). The result is sent to your GP and the images will be kept in our archive.

## Before your mammogram

- For your convenience, wear a two piece outfit, a skirt or trousers and a top.
- Don't wear talcum powder or a deodorant as it may show on the images.
- If your breasts are tender or sore before your period, you should try to arrange to have your mammogram just after your period finishes.
- A standard mammogram takes approximately thirty minutes. However your examination may take 60 minutes longer if extra views and/or ultrasound are required.

Please allow plenty of time.

- If you need an examination by a breast surgeon, or a needle biopsy, Canterbury Breastcare can arrange this on site, sometimes at the same visit.
- Please bring all previous mammograms that you have in your possession with you.

## Want more information?

If you require further information about mammography, ask your doctor or phone Canterbury Breastcare on (03) 355 1194, our staff will be happy to help you.

The Canterbury-West Coast division of the Cancer Society offers a range of information and support services throughout the region.

The Society's offices are at 246 Manchester Street, Christchurch, phone (03) 379 5835.



Level 2, Leinster Chambers, St George's Medical Centre

249 Papanui Road, Christchurch, Telephone (03) 355 1194, Fax (03) 355 1196



**One in ten women will suffer from breast cancer... the good news is, for her there is Canterbury Breastcare**