

Myths and Facts about Mammograms

MYTH: breast self-exams are just as effective as mammograms

FACT: Breast cancers often form a lump, but usually that is when they have grown larger. That's why regular mammograms, which can spot cancer before a lump forms, are important.

MYTH: I don't have a family history of breast cancer, so I don't need to be screened

FACT: 75% of breast cancers are found in women with no family history.

MYTH: mammograms are too expensive to have regularly

FACT: Medicare, Medicaid and most insurance plans cover a yearly mammogram as part of a well-woman plan. Check with your insurance company to find out what is covered. Women who are uninsured or underinsured may be eligible for free mammograms.

MYTH: I'm afraid they'll find something

FACT: It's normal to be anxious about a medical test, but the earlier breast cancer is found, the more treatable it is.

MYTH: my mammogram was normal last year, so I don't need one this year

FACT: Mammography is detection, not prevention. So, just because you had a normal mammogram last year doesn't mean you can skip. Cancer can start to develop at any time.

MYTH: a mammogram will expose me to too much radiation

FACT: Mammograms are done with a machine designed to look only at breast tissue. The machine takes x-rays at lower doses than the x-rays done to look at other parts of the body, like the lungs or bones.

MYTH: I'm old, I don't need mammograms anymore

FACT: Risk for breast cancer increases with age. There is no recommendation for when to stop having mammograms. Talk with your doctor if you have questions.



 **St. Luke's**



Managing Your Breast Health

Know Your Risk Factors

Breast cancer is a serious disease, but it is highly treatable when caught early. Mammography is the best test to detect early breast cancer — when detected early, the survival rate is greater than 90%. Knowing your risk factors can also help you take steps to reduce your chances for developing breast cancer. Risk factors include:

- A family or personal history of breast cancer
- A genetic mutation known to increase risk such as BRCA
- Starting menstrual period early, especially before age 12
- Going through menopause after age 55
- Lifestyle factors, such as drinking alcohol, being overweight or not being physically active
- Long-term hormone replacement therapy

Know Your Breasts

- Start breast exams at age 21 at the doctor's office and annual mammograms at age 40 for women at average risk. Talk to your doctor to see if you qualify for a baseline mammogram at an earlier age.
- Not all breast cancers form a noticeable lump, so get to know your breasts to be aware of changes that look concerning.
- When breast cancers do form a lump, it is usually when they have grown larger. It is important to find tumors and growths well before you can feel them. That's why regular mammograms, which can spot cancer before a lump forms, are important.
- Breast density matters. About 40% of women have dense breast tissue, which is more fibrous and glandular with less fat. Sometimes the dense breast tissue can hide abnormalities like breast cancer. There are other tools to assess dense breasts in addition to mammography, such as whole breast ultrasound or MRI. Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider about screening options for dense breasts.

Manage Your Health

While there isn't a sure way to prevent breast cancer, you have control of your breast health and can change some risk factors. Some of these include maintaining a healthy weight, getting regular exercise and drinking alcohol in moderation. Getting your regular screenings, such as clinical breast exams and mammograms, offers the best chance of early detection.

St. Luke's offers six convenient locations in the St. Louis area for 3D mammography as well as a full range of comprehensive breast health services. St. Luke's Women's Center also offers a High-Risk Breast Clinic to provide you with a personalized approach to help reduce your risk for breast cancer.