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## Mammograms: What Women Should Know

**D**id you know breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women? Or that it's the second most common cause of cancer deaths in women in the United States? And the most frequent cause of death in women between the ages of 45 and 55?

Fortunately, women are becoming better educated about breast cancer and its risk factors, as well as the need for regular self-exams to help guard against the disease.

Women should practice good breast health by performing a monthly breast self-exam and having a doctor perform a clinical breast exam during their annual gynecological visit. Women over the age of 40 should also schedule regular mammograms to screen for signs of breast cancer. Mammography screening remains the best method to detect breast cancer in its early stages.

If you've never had a mammogram, here's what you should know:

- Avoid using deodorant the day of the mammogram.
- A specially trained radiological technologist will perform the mammogram. You'll be asked to undress from the waist up only and stand next to the X-ray machine.
- Two flat surfaces will compress first one breast, then the other, for a few seconds each. The entire process is short and for most women, relatively painless — and it just may save your life.

Breast cancer may also be diagnosed with ultrasound testing and biopsy.

Thanks to advances in screening, diagnosis and treatment, the death rate for breast cancer has declined in the last decade. October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and the perfect time to get the facts or schedule a mammogram if you've reached the right age. The American Cancer Society recommends that a woman have a baseline mammogram between the ages of 35 and 40 years. Between 40 and 50, mammograms are recommended every other year. After age 50, yearly mammograms are recommended.

Source: [medicinenet.com](http://medicinenet.com)

## Learn the Warning Signs of Breast Cancer

Women who are experiencing breast pain or any of the following symptoms should consult their healthcare provider:

- A lump or hard knot or thickening in or near the breast
- Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast
- A nipple turned inward into the breast
- Change in size or shape of the breast
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin
- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly
- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple

Source: [medicinenet.com](http://medicinenet.com)



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## Breast Cancer Risk Factors

Studies have uncovered the following risk factors that may increase the chance of developing breast cancer:

**Age:** Women are more at risk for breast cancer as they age. Most cases occur in women over 60.

**Personal history of breast cancer:** If a woman has experienced breast cancer in one breast, she is at an increased risk of getting cancer in her other breast.

**Race:** Caucasian women are diagnosed with breast cancer more often than Latina, Asian or African-American women.

**Family history:** A woman's risk of breast cancer is higher if her mother, sister or daughter had breast cancer. Having other relatives with breast cancer (in either her mother's or father's family) may also increase a woman's risk.

**Radiation therapy to the chest:** Women who had

radiation therapy to the chest (including breasts) before age 30 are at an increased risk of breast cancer.

**Drinking alcohol:** Studies suggest the more alcohol a woman drinks, the greater her risk of breast cancer.

**Menstruation and menopause factors:** Women who start menstrual periods before age 12, give birth at an older age, experience menopause after 55 or take menopausal hormone therapy with estrogen plus progesterin after menopause are at an increased risk of developing breast cancer.

Researchers continue to study the effect of diet, physical activity and genetics on breast cancer risk. If you think you may be at risk, discuss your concerns with your doctor. Your doctor may be able to suggest ways to reduce your risk and can plan a schedule for checkups.

Source: [medicinenet.com](http://medicinenet.com)

## Get Answers with Our New Online Customer Inquiry Form

Have a question about your claim? Want to know if a service is covered under your plan? Get the answers to your healthcare questions using our new secure online Customer Inquiry Form.

This form allows you to submit questions to our Customer Service Department securely and conveniently – any time of day or night. Simply log on to the Blue Cross website at [www.bcbsla.com](http://www.bcbsla.com), click on Customer, then choose Customer Inquiry Form. Follow the directions on the screen to get started!

### Types of Questions:

- **Claims.** Choose this category to submit questions about your claim(s). You can enter up to 10 claims per form. Remember, this category is for past services. For current or future needs, select either the "Benefits" or "Other" category.
- **Benefits.** Choose this category to ask a question about benefits for *future* care. (Note: If you need authorization for a medical procedure scheduled in the very near future, please call the Medical Authorization number on your ID card. If you have a medical emergency, call 911.)
- **Other.** Choose this category to ask us anything else about your coverage.

## Healthcare Dollars and Sense

Did you know?

- About 75 percent of every private health insurance premium dollar goes toward the costs of hospitals, physician services and prescription drugs.
- Hospital stays, physician services and prescription drug costs continue to increase faster than any other health-related expense.
- Dental costs, nursing home costs and home health services account for another 11 percent of healthcare expenditures.
- Health insurance companies use only about 14 cents of every premium dollar for administrative costs, commissions, taxes and contributions to reserve funds for emergencies.

Source: *Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (2007)*



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