Women’s Imaging
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Mammogram

What is the test?

- A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast. Mammograms are useful for finding cancers when they are too small to be felt as a lump. A mammogram is also useful for helping to determine whether lumps felt in the breast are caused by something less worrisome.

How do I prepare for the test?

- You should avoid using deodorant, powder, creams, lotions or perfumes on the underarms or breasts on the day of your mammogram because they can show up on x-rays and look very much like cancer when they do.

What happens when the test is performed?

- You will be asked to undress from the waist up. For most patients, 2 pictures will be taken of each breast – one from the side and one from the top. Before each picture is taken, your breast will be pressed briefly between 2 flat plates so that the breast tissue is spread out. This part of the mammogram is uncomfortable, but it does not last long and it is necessary in order for the x-ray to show a clear view of all areas of the breast.

How long is it before the result of the test is known?

- You will receive a letter with your results from our Mammography Department.

If there is anything we can do to make you more comfortable while in the Radiology Department, please do not hesitate to ask.
Needle Localization via Mammography

What is the test?

- Sometimes an abnormal area will be seen on the mammogram that clearly should be tested for cancer or completely removed from the breast, but this area is not easily felt as a lump on examination. The mammography department can help your surgeon to find the area more easily by using a technique called “wire localization.”

- In “wire localization”, the radiologists (who have had the benefit of seeing the abnormal area on your mammograms) mark the abnormality with a wire that is inserted under your skin into the area of the breast that is causing concern. Right afterward, the surgeon can meet you in the operating room and can use the wire to find the abnormal spot in your breast so that he or she can remove it.

How do I prepare for the test?

- You will be asked to sign a permission or “consent” form allowing your doctor to perform this test.

- You will be asked not to eat anything for at least 8 hours before the surgery. An empty stomach will help prevent nausea that can be a side effect of anesthesia medicines. You should arrange for a ride home from the hospital; most patients can go home on the same day as the surgery.

- If you are taking insulin, discuss this with your doctor before the test. If you take aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or other medicines that affect blood clotting, talk with your doctor. It may be necessary to stop or adjust the dose of these medications before your test.

- Prior to surgery (sometimes on the same day), you will meet with an anesthesiologist to discuss your medical history (including medicines and allergies) and the anesthesia that is planned for you surgery.

What happens when the test is performed?

- The first part of the procedure occurs in the mammography department. Although you probably recently had a mammogram, a radiologist will perform another one to find the abnormal area. While watching your x-ray on a screen, the radiologist will then decide where in your breast the abnormality is. He or she will insert a needle into your breast in this area and will take another picture that shows the needle in place, to be sure the end of the needle is in close proximity to the middle of the area of concern. The needle might require some adjustment so that it is placed just right.
Needle Localization via Mammography

What happens when the test is performed? (Continued)

- The needle is hollow and the radiologist can slide a small wire right through it. This wire has a tiny fishhook on its end so when the end of the wire reaches the point of the needle in your breast, it can grab onto your breast tissue and hold itself in place. Then the needle can be pulled out, sliding over the outside end of the wire and leaving the wire in your breast.

- You will be taken to the operating room for the second part of the biopsy. You will have an IV (intravenous) line placed in your arm so that you can receive medication through it. Your procedure may be done under “local” or “general” anesthesia. Local anesthesia is similar to the kind most people get at the dentist—a numbing medication is injected in a few places under your skin surface so that you won’t feel anything in the specific area that will be worked on during the surgery. General anesthesia, on the other hand, causes you to be asleep or unconscious during the procedure and is administered by an anesthesiologist. For general anesthesia, you breathe a mixture of gases through a mask. After the anesthetic takes effect, a tube may be put down your throat to help you breathe.

- An incision will be made in your breast right where the wire sticks out of your skin. The surgeon will feel along the wire and separate the breast tissue from the wire until he or she finds where the end of the wire is hooked into your breast. The surgeon knows that it is the area right at the end of the wire that looks abnormal on your mammogram and needs removal. He or she will take out a small sample of breast tissue from the area surrounding the end of the wire—the wire will be removed with the chunk since it will still be holding onto the middle of it.

- While you are still in the operating room, your surgeon will give the breast lump removed (still with the wire attached) to the Mammography Dept. The technologist will take a special x-ray of the removed lump to see if it looks the same as the spot that had caused concern on your mammogram. The technologist shows the film to the Radiologist who then can confirm for the surgeon that the correct piece has been removed.

- If you had general anesthesia, you will have your anesthesia stopped so that you can wake up within minutes of your biopsy being finished.
Needle Localization via Mammography

Must I do anything special after the test is over?

- You will be watched for a few hours after your surgery to make sure that you are recovering well. You may be asked to sit up and drink liquids. For most breast biopsies, you can go home on the same day as the operation.
- You should contact your doctor if you develop a fever over 101 degrees, strong pain at your surgery site, or bleeding from your wound. You will have a follow-up visit with your doctor to remove stitches if this is needed and to make sure you are recovering well.
- You can return to normal activities, although general anesthesia (if you had this) may make you feel like taking the rest of the day off. If you have had anesthesia or antianxiety medicine, you should not drive or drink alcohol following your test.

How long is it before the result of the test is known?

- Report from the biopsy can take several days.

If there is anything we can do to make you more comfortable while in the Mammography Department, please do not hesitate to ask.
Stereotactic Breast Biopsy

What is the test?

- A breast core biopsy is the removal of small fragments of breast tissue through a needle, using a mammogram x-ray machine to direct the needle to an exact location. This test is often done when there is an abnormal area seen on a mammogram, but no lump can be felt in the breast on examination. The breast core biopsy is one way of checking you for cancer.

How do I prepare for the test?

- There is no special preparation for this test, but if you take medicines such as aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, coumadin or heparin that can thin your blood, you may be asked to stop these medicines for several days before the test to avoid bleeding complications. Tell your doctor ahead of time if you have ever had an allergic reaction to the medication lidocaine or the numbing medicine used at the dentist’s office.

What happens when the test is performed?

- You will wear a hospital gown that is open to the front and will lie on your stomach on a special x-ray table. This table has an opening in it that allows your breast to hang down. Your breast will be held between some plates. Mammography x-rays will be taken and used as a map to show exactly where the abnormal area inside your breast is located. You will have some numbing medicine injected under the skin of your breast with a small needle. Then a needle will be inserted into the area that needs testing, so a sample can be taken. The needle’s position will be checked on a mammogram picture as it is inserted. You are likely to feel some brief discomfort from this procedure. The sampling only takes a few seconds once the needle is inserted, but the whole test more often requires between 30 and 60 minutes.

Must I do anything special after the test is over?

- No.

How long is it before the result of the test is known?

- Examination of the biopsy sample may require 3 or 4 days.

If there is anything we can do to make you more comfortable while in the Mammography Department, please do not hesitate to ask.