



Benefits & Drawbacks of Screening Mammograms

Regular screening mammograms have proven to save lives, but like any screening test there are benefits and there can be drawbacks. To make an informed decision, you should be aware of both.

Benefits

- Finds most breast cancers early, usually before it has spread – when there are better treatment options and a return to health is more likely.
- The doctor can detect smaller and smaller changes because there are previous x-rays available for comparison.
- When done on a regular basis (at least once every 24 months), it is one of the most effective ways to detect breast cancer early.

Drawbacks

- You may have a false-positive result. This means you have an abnormal result, but you don't have breast cancer. In order to determine that you don't have breast cancer, you would need further tests.
- A radiation risk is assumed, but not proven. There has never been a breast cancer proven to be caused because of radiation exposure during mammography. However, it has been calculated that the chance of a single mammogram causing a breast cancer is less than 1 in a million.
- Most, but not all breast cancers can be detected by mammograms. The remainder can usually be found through a breast physical examination, which is recommended as part of your annual medical check-up.
- A small percentage of breast cancers that are detected by mammograms may not become life threatening. Unfortunately, we can't always tell if a cancer is not life threatening, which is why treatment is recommended.