



American Association on Health & Disability

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Tips for Women with Disabilities: Getting Your Mammogram

Q: What is a mammogram?

A low-dose X-ray picture of the breast used to detect breast cancer.

Q: Why is it important to get a mammogram?

Mammograms can show breast changes like cysts, lumps or tumors before they can be felt during a breast exam. Research has found that most changes that are found are not cancer.

Q. How often should a woman get a mammogram?

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) recommends that women age 40 and older have mammograms every 1 to 2 years. Women under age 40 should talk with their health care providers about their risk for breast cancer and their need for mammograms. Some women with disabilities may be at higher risk due to certain factors such as obesity, lack of or delayed childbearing, radiation exposure, or delayed diagnosis due to barriers in obtaining preventive screening.

Q. How can I, a woman with a disability, maintain my breast health effectively?

- **Have regular breast exams**—perform self breast exams once each month, get a clinical breast exam from your doctor when you get your annual physical exam, and get a mammogram if you are forty years of age or older, or if your doctor recommends it.
- **Call your doctor's office** if you notice a lump or thickening of the breast, a dimple, discharge from the nipple, or skin changes on the breast.
- **Schedule the mammogram** when your breasts will be least tender, usually the week after your period.
- **Prepare for the mammogram** by wearing a blouse that opens in the front or a top that is easily removed. Don't wear underarm deodorant. Don't wear body powder or lotion on or near the breasts.

- At the exam, be prepared to **provide the health care provider with information** on any changes in your medical history, the date of your last period, your current medications, and any chronic pain or breast problems.
- **Be a self-advocate!** When scheduling the mammogram appointment, whether you are the patient with a disability or the caregiver of the patient, **inform the scheduling staff of your particular disability and request any reasonable accommodations needed**, such as extra time, a sign language interpreter, or assistance with dressing or positioning. If you have had a prior mammogram, tell the technologist what positioning or accommodations have worked for you in the past.
- Depending upon your disability, consider requesting the following accommodations when scheduling the appointment and during the exam:
 - **Blind or Visual:** Inform staff if you will need alternate formats of printed material such as large print, computer disc/CD-ROM, Braille, or cassette tape. Tell the staff if you would like a sighted guide to walk with you through the area.
 - **Communication Disabilities:** Inform the staff that it might take extra time for you to communicate effectively with them. Let staff know your preferred method of communication.
 - **Deaf or Hard of Hearing:** Use the Relay Telecommunications system to communicate with mammogram facility staff when scheduling or calling the office. Let the staff know if you need a sign language interpreter at least a few days in advance of your appointment. Invite a friend or family member to go with you if you think you may have trouble hearing or understanding the instructions or medical information. Let the medical staff know about your hearing loss and how they can help you communicate and understand.
 - **Emotional Disabilities:** Before the exam, prepare emotionally by thinking about the importance of having a mammogram and practicing relaxation and deep breathing techniques. Use these techniques during the exam to lessen anxiety. It might be helpful to remember that any discomfort you may experience during the mammogram exam lasts only a few seconds. Invite a friend or family member to go with you if she will help make you feel more at ease.
 - **Intellectual Disabilities:** It is important to ask questions if you don't understand something, and you might want to take notes during the exam to refer to later. If it is difficult for you to take notes, have someone you trust come and take notes and help you with questions. If you are a caregiver of a person with an intellectual disability, accompany the patient to the appointment and stay with her if she is anxious. If the patient has never had a mammogram, ask the staff to let her know what to expect.

- **Physical/Mobility Disabilities:** Let scheduling staff know if you use a wheelchair, scooter, walker, or cane. Ask if the facility (including the parking lot, building, elevator, waiting area, mammography suite, dressing room and restrooms) is accessible. Tell the scheduling staff if you can sit upright without assistance, stand, lift and move your arms, transfer from your wheelchair or scooter to a positioning chair if available, and undress and dress without assistance. Ask if you can remain in your wheelchair or scooter during the mammogram and if you can be accommodated if your wheelchair does not have removable arms. Tell staff if you experience spasticity or other physical issues that may interfere with the mammogram procedure.

Q. May I invite a friend or family member to go to my mammogram appointment with me?

Yes.

Q. What should I do after the mammogram?

Once you receive your results, call your health care provider if you have questions.

RESOURCES

American Association on Health & Disability www.aahd.us

Breast Health Access for Women with Disabilities (BHAWD) www.bhawd.org

Center for Research on Women with Disabilities www.bcm.tmc.edu/crowd

The National Women's Health Information Center www.4woman.gov

North Carolina Office on Disability and Health/Chapel Hill, NC www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh

Susan G. Komen for the Cure www.komen.org

For more information, please contact Komen Project Coordinator at 301-545-6140 x203 or visit our website at www.aahd.us

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