

digital mammography)



the team behind your team



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Digital mammography and the Great Falls Clinic

The Great Falls Clinic believes that early detection is the best prevention against breast cancer, which is why we provide you with state-of-the-art technology. We now offer full field digital mammography as part of our women's health screening and diagnostic services. Full field digital mammography is the most advanced mammographic imaging technology available and shows great promise in breast cancer detection and prevention.

Our primary goal has always been to deliver the highest quality care to our patients, which is why we have added this new technology to our women's health diagnostic services. Join us in the fight against breast cancer and schedule your annual mammogram today.

What is digital mammography?

Digital mammography uses computers and specially designed digital detectors to produce an image that can be displayed on a high-resolution computer monitor. The image can then be transmitted and stored similar to computer files.

From a patient's point of view, having a digital mammogram is similar to having a conventional screen film mammogram. Both film-based and digital mammography use compression and x-rays to create images of the breast. During all mammography exams, the technologist positions the patient to image the breast from different angles and compresses the breast with a paddle to obtain optimal image quality. Digital mammograms, however, produce images that appear on the technologist's monitor almost immediately. There is no waiting for film to develop, which can mean that the patient may spend a shorter amount of time in the breast imaging suite.



What are the benefits of digital mammography?

Unlike other parts of the body, the breast is composed mainly of soft tissue. When breast tissue is x-rayed, it creates an image that looks something like a smoky haze, making it difficult to see tiny spots, called microcalcifications, and other subtle signs of early cancer.

With digital mammography, the radiologist reviews electronic images of the breast, using special high-resolution monitors. The physician can adjust the brightness, change contrast and zoom in for close ups of specific areas of interest. Being able to manipulate images is one of the main benefits of digital technology. Another convenience of digital mammography, when compared to film-based systems, is that it can greatly reduce the need for retakes due to over- or under-exposure. This potentially saves additional time and reduces your exposure to x-rays.

Because digital mammograms are electronic, the images can be transmitted quickly across a network. Digital images can also be easily stored, copied without any loss of information and transmitted and received in a more streamlined manner, eliminating dependence on only one set of original films.

Early Detection

Breast cancer will affect an average of one in eight women sometime in their lifetime. It is the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths in women. Studies have proven that early detection is a vital component in the successful treatment of breast cancer.

Methods for early detection of breast cancer include clinical examinations by a healthcare professional and mammography. In most cases, mammography can identify an abnormal breast mass as many as two years before it can be detected by touch. Some physicians also recommend a monthly breast self-examination for all women beginning at the age of 20, following proper training by a qualified healthcare professional.

Understanding Mammograms

Mammograms play a major role in early detection of breast cancer because they can detect changes in the breast that could be early signs of cancer, but are too small or subtle to be felt. The use of mammography has greatly enhanced the ability to detect breast cancers at earlier stages.

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an x-ray examination of the breasts, used to detect and diagnose breast diseases. Screening mammography is used as a preventive measure for women who have no symptoms of breast disease. A screening mammogram usually involves two views of each breast. Diagnostic mammography involves additional views of the breast and is used when an abnormality is found during screening or in women who have breast complaints (such as a breast mass, nipple discharge, breast pain or skin irritation). Mammography is a very safe procedure that uses low doses of radiation to produce high-quality x-rays.

Are there different kinds of mammograms?

Two kinds of mammograms are available: screen-film mammography and full field digital mammography. Screen-film mammography uses x-ray beams that are captured on a film cassette. The film is then developed and a physician who specializes in the interpretation of x-rays and other types of diagnostic imaging studies and reviews the film on a high-intensity light box. Digital mammography uses x-ray beams that are captured on specially designed digital detectors. The digital detectors convert the x-ray beams into electronic signals, which are then sent to a computer. The radiologist can then review the digital mammogram on a high-resolution computer monitor.

Who should receive mammograms?

The American Cancer Society recommends that all women have a baseline screening mammogram between the ages of 35 and 40 and that beginning at the age of 40, women receive an annual screening mammogram. Women with certain risk factors should discuss an appropriate screening program with their physician.

How should I prepare for a mammogram?

If you have had mammograms in different facilities other than the Great Falls Clinic, call those facilities in advance and arrange to have your previous mammograms, reports and any other treatment reports forwarded. Do not wear deodorant, powder or cream under your arms, as it may interfere with the quality of your mammogram.

How is mammography performed?

Your entire procedure should take about twenty minutes. You will need to undress above the waist and will be given a wrap to wear during the mammogram. The breast imaging technologist will position each breast, one at a time, on the mammography equipment. The breast will then be compressed and an x-ray will be taken. If you are having a screen-film mammogram, the technologist will take all of the x-rays needed for the examination and will then develop the film before you leave in order to ensure each film shows the correct view and exposure. If you are receiving a digital mammogram, each x-ray will appear on the technologist's computer screen, allowing he/she to make sure each image shows the correct view before positioning you for the next x-ray.

Are mammograms painful?

Receiving a mammogram should not be a painful experience. Minimal discomfort might be experienced for a brief time during each x-ray due to breast compression. Breast compression helps obtain better x-rays by:

- Flattening the breast so that the maximum amount of tissue can be examined.
- Allowing a lower x-ray dose to be used.
- Holding the breast in place to prevent blurring caused by motion. If you have sensitive breasts, schedule your mammogram at a time of the month when your breasts will be less tender. In general, the week after a period is when breasts are less tender.

How will I get my results?

Your mammogram will be read by a radiologist. The radiologist will send a report to your physician who will then notify you of the results. Be sure to ask your physician when you will receive the results of your mammogram. If you do not hear from your physician, don't assume your mammogram was normal. Confirm this by calling your physician's office.

What are risk factors for breast cancer?

Some known risk factors for breast cancer include:

- Family or personal history of breast cancer
- Early menstrual onset/late onset menopause
- Use of oral contraceptives
- Use of hormone replacement therapy
- Alcohol use (2 or more drinks/day)

Contact Us

For more information about the Great Falls Clinic and digital mammography, or to schedule an appointment, please call 454-2171.

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