

Having a mammogram

The aim of this information sheet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about having a mammogram. It explains the benefits and risks of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a mammographer in the Breast Imaging Unit, or to one of the breast care nurses. Contact numbers are included at the bottom of this sheet.

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is the name for a specialised x-ray of the breast which shows small details of the breast tissue that cannot be seen in any other way. Mammograms are carried out by mammographers (female radiographers or assistant practitioners that have been specially trained to perform this examination).

What are the benefits – why should I have this procedure?

Mammograms are able to detect changes within your breast, some of which you may be aware of (such as a breast lump). A mammogram may also detect changes that cannot be felt during a physical examination. This includes small changes within your breast which may require further investigation. The early detection of breast cancer can lead to higher success rates in treatment.

Mammograms are reviewed by radiologists and mammographers that are specially trained to perform and interpret the results of your mammogram.

What are the risks?

Mammograms involve a very small dose of radiation, so the health risks are very low. Scientists have worked out that there is less than one in 25,000 risk of the radiation from a mammogram causing breast cancer. In fact, the amount of radiation involved in a mammogram is equal to the radiation we receive naturally from the environment over a period of a few months to a year. If you do have a breast lump or significant problem, the risk of not having the examination will be much greater than the risk associated with the radiation dose.

Are there any alternatives?

If you are pregnant, think you might be pregnant, or are currently breastfeeding, it is essential that you inform a radiographer as soon as you receive your appointment. This is so that the radiographer can assess whether an alternative investigation (such as an ultrasound scan) may be more appropriate. You can contact the department on the numbers given at the bottom of this sheet.

How can I prepare for a mammogram?

There are no special preparations beforehand for this procedure. You can eat and drink normally before and after. However:

- It is advisable to wear clothes that can be easily removed, as you will be asked to undress from the waist upwards.
- If you have breast implants, please inform the radiographer when you arrive for your appointment.
- Do not wear deodorant, powder, lotion or perfume on your breasts and underarm areas on the day of your appointment, as these will affect the x-ray image.
- Try to bring a friend or relative to accompany you home. This may also be useful if you do not understand English very well or if you have any special needs. Although your friend or relative may not be allowed into the examination room, they can be a valuable source of support for you on the day. If you require an interpreter to attend your appointment, please contact the Language Support Service on 020 7188 8815.
- Please be aware that we are unable to offer childcare facilities. If you need to bring your children with you, please bring along an adult who can supervise them when your examination is being carried out.

Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves.

If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you.

What happens during the procedure?

The procedure should last no longer than 15 minutes. The mammographer will call you in to the x-ray room, ask you a few questions about your general health and explain the procedure to you. If you have any additional questions, she will be more than happy to answer them for you.

Once all of the questions have been answered and you are happy to proceed with the mammogram, the mammographer will ask you to remove all of your clothes from the waist up. She will then get you to stand in front of the x-ray machine where she will position you for your mammogram.

Each breast, in turn, will be placed on to the x-ray machine and firmly compressed by a clear plate. The compression will only last a few seconds and does not cause any harm to the breasts. Compression is needed to keep the breast still and to get the clearest picture with the lowest amount of radiation possible. Usually two images are taken of each breast but if your breasts are larger than average it may be necessary to take more than two images of each breast.

Will I feel any pain?

Some women find compression slightly uncomfortable and some feel short-lived pain. Research has shown that many women regard a mammogram as less painful than having a blood test, and find that the compression compares to having blood pressure measured.

What happens after the procedure?

The mammogram images will be reviewed by a radiologist or a specially trained radiographer and a report will be issued to the consultant that referred you. Sometimes it is necessary to call patients back for a further mammogram to examine more closely any areas of change in the breast. This is very common and although may seem alarming at the time, it is a normal procedure to help produce the most accurate report possible.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You can go back to normal activity, including work and sports, straight away.

What should I do if I have a problem?

Following a mammogram you should not have any adverse after-effects to cause concern. However, we have included contact numbers at the bottom of this sheet if you feel you need any advice.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

If you have come for your mammogram via an appointment at the Breast Unit One Stop Clinic, you may be asked to return to the Breast Unit once all your tests have been completed. Here, the breast consultant will discuss your results with you. Otherwise you will receive confirmation of your results in the post and a copy will be sent to your GP, usually within two weeks.

If you have come for an outpatient mammogram appointment, the Breast Unit will notify you and your GP of the results of your mammogram by post. This may take up to four weeks. If you have not been contacted by the Breast Unit within four weeks, please phone the Breast Unit secretary on 020 7188 4246.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns before your appointment, please contact one of the mammographers in the Breast Imaging Unit on 020 7188 5574 or one of the breast care nurses on 020 7188 0869 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

If you have any questions or problems after your appointment, please contact the Breast Clinic on 020 7188 1483 or the mammogram secretary on 020 7188 4246 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership