Awali Hospital

Energising your health

Mammography

Radiology Department

What is mammography?

Mammography is a specific type of imaging that uses a low dose x-ray system for the examination of breasts. A mammography exam, called a mammogram, is used as a screening tool to detect early breast cancer in women experiencing no symptoms and to detect and diagnose breast disease in women experiencing symptoms such as a lump, pain or nipple discharge.

Why is mammography important?

Mammography plays a central part in the early detection of breast cancers because it can show changes in the breast up to 2 years before a patient or physician can feel them. Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers amongst women worldwide. In the United States, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women and accounts for about 30% (or 1 in 3) of all new female cancers each year. In the UK, about 12,000 women die of breast cancer every year. Survival from the disease has been improving over time and now about 3 out of 4 women diagnosed with breast cancer are alive 10 years later.

Research has shown that annual mammograms lead to early detection of breast cancers, when they are most curable and breast conservation therapies are available.

While mammography is the best screening tool for breast cancer available today, mammograms do not detect all breast cancers. Also, a small portion of mammograms indicate cancer is present when it is not (called a false positive result). Therefore, it is important for you to check your breasts regularly to know what is normal for you. If you have any queries, please discuss this with your doctor.

How should I prepare for a mammogram?

- Do not schedule your mammogram for the week before your period if you are breasts are usually tender during this time. The best time for a mammogram is one week following your period.
- Always inform your doctor or radiographer if there is any possibility that you are pregnant.
- Where a comfortable outfit.
- Do not use deodorant, perfume, powder or ointment on the underarms or breasts.
- Please bring all your previous mammograms and reports so that they can be compared with your current examination.
- You would be asked to fill in a questionnaire before the start of your mammogram.

How is a mammogram performed?

The mammograms are performed by a specially trained female radiographer.

- In the mammogram room, you will be asked to stand at the x-ray machine.
- The radiographer will position your breast in the mammography unit.
- Your breast will be placed on a special platform and compressed with the paddle. (Often made of clear plastic).
- You will feel pressure on the breast as it is squeezed by the compressor.

- Some women with sensitive breasts may experience discomfort. The discomfort lasts for a few seconds only.
- The technologist will stand behind a glass shield during the x-ray exposure.
- You will be asked to change positions slightly between images, so that a picture from above and from the side will be taken, and then repeated for the other breast.

How often should I have a screening mammogram?

Depending on which country you are undergoing the mammogram, different guidelines exist. In general, and annual screening mammogram is recommended. If you have no positive family history, or any high-risk factors, you may potentially have a screening mammogram every 2 years.

Breast compression is necessary in order to:

- Even out the breast thickness, so that all of the tissue can be visualised.
- Spread out the tissue so that small abnormalities will not be obscured by overlying breast tissue.
- Allow the use of a lower x-ray dose since a thinner amount of breast tissue is being imaged.
- Hold the breast still in order to eliminate blurring of the image caused by motion.
- Reduce x-ray scatter to increase sharpness of picture.
- When the mammogram is completed, you will be asked to wait until the radiologist reviews the images, and then a breast ultrasound may be performed to complement the mammography examination.
- If you are found to have breast cancer, it could be either non-invasive or invasive.

Non-invasive breast cancer

About 1 in 5 women diagnosed with breast cancer through screening will have non-invasive cancer. This means there are cancer cells in the breast, but they are only found inside the milk ducts (tubes) and have not spread any further. This is called ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS). In some women the cancer cells stay inside the ducts, but in others they will grow into (invade) the surrounding breast in the future.

Doctors cannot tell whether non-invasive breast cancers will grow into the surrounding breast or not.

Invasive breast cancer

About 4 in 5 women diagnosed with breast cancer through screening will have invasive cancer. This is cancer that has grown out of the milk ducts and into the surrounding breast. Most invasive breast cancers will spread to the other parts of the body if left untreated.

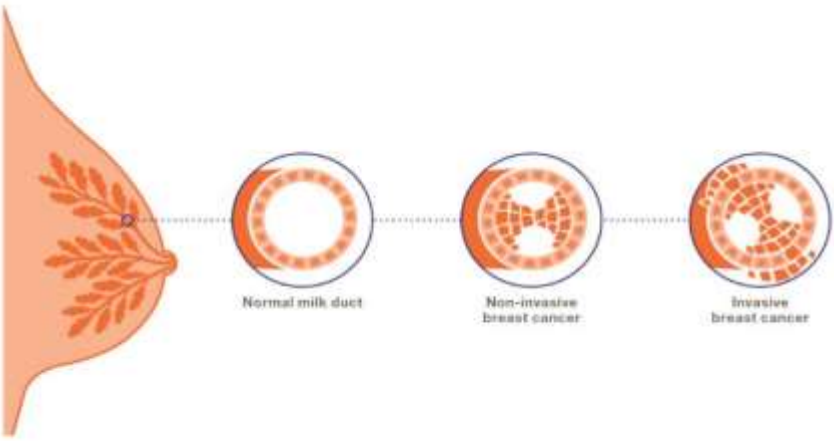

Diagram showing the development of breast cancer in a milk duct

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