

What is a Diagnostic Mammogram?

Why you need one, where they are done, how long they take, and what to expect before, during, and after your appointment.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE
NOVA SCOTIA BREAST SCREENING PROGRAM

What is a Diagnostic Mammogram?

A diagnostic mammogram is done to assess a breast problem, such as a lump or other breast changes. Exams are performed by highly trained mammography technologist.

WHY DO I NEED ONE?

Sometimes a diagnostic mammogram is required after a screening mammogram; it does not mean you have breast cancer. In fact, 90% of all recalled screening mammograms turn out to be normal after further imaging is performed. A diagnostic mammogram takes longer than a screening mammogram. More pictures and different views of the breast may be taken to look more closely at an area in the breast.

WHERE ARE THEY DONE?

Diagnostic mammograms are performed in 9 Diagnostic Imaging departments in Nova Scotia. Diagnostic mammograms are not done on the mobile breast screening van.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

You should arrive 30 minutes before your appointment time to register. Your diagnostic mammogram will take about 30 minutes but it may be longer if more pictures are needed.

ON THE DAY OF YOUR DIAGNOSTIC MAMMOGRAM:

- > Bring your health card.
- > Wear a 2 piece outfit with a top that buttons up the front. You will be asked to undress from the waist up.
- > Do not use deodorant, powder, creams or lotions on the day of your appointment. These products may show up on the X-ray picture and make it harder to read your mammogram.
- > Some women find it helpful to avoid caffeine a few days before a mammogram.
- > You may want to take an over-the-counter pain medication one hour before your mammogram appointment if you find mammograms uncomfortable.

WHO CAN I CONTACT?

Nova Scotia Breast Screening Program

For questions about appointment time

902-473-3960 (in HRM) or
1-800-565-0548 (province-wide)

To talk to our Patient Navigator

902-425-2410 (in HRM) or
1-844-283-0409 (province-wide)



What can I expect during a Diagnostic Mammogram?

During your 30+ minute diagnostic appointment:

1. You will be asked questions by the mammography technologist such as: the number pregnancies you have had, when you had your first period, if there's a family history of breast cancer, or if you use hormones.
2. You will be asked to remove your clothing from the waist up (You are welcome to wear a shirt or sweater that opens in the front until you are at the mammography machine).
3. The technologist will place your breast on a special X-ray machine.
4. A plastic plate will be used to hold your breast in place for a few seconds. You will be asked to hold your breath while the picture is being taken.

5. You will feel some pressure on your breast during the X-ray. Pressure is necessary to spread the breast tissue and limit movement which may blur the picture. This may be uncomfortable but usually lasts less than 10 seconds.
6. Usually four pictures are taken, two of each breast. Additional pictures may be taken to see the breast tissue properly.
7. Additional X-ray or ultrasound pictures may be needed.

HOW DO I GET MY RESULTS?

Your Primary Care Provider Will Notify You

The mammography technologist will not be able to tell you what they see on the pictures. The radiologist will look at your images and the report will be sent to your health care provider.

Important to Keep in Mind

Even though a follow-up diagnostic mammogram is needed, it does not mean you have breast cancer.

90% of all follow-up diagnostic mammograms performed (after the initial screening mammogram) turn out to be normal.