



BREAST IMAGING TESTS

This information is for women who are to have a breast ultrasound or mammogram to investigate changes in their breast.

Your specialist at the Breast Clinic has arranged tests to investigate a change in your breast.

The tests that we will explain in this sheet are called imaging. This is because they involve taking pictures (images) of your breast. The pictures are used to investigate lumps or other changes in the breast. The forms of imaging that we will talk about are:

- » mammograms
- » ultrasounds.

Your specialist will talk with you about the tests that you need. Women often worry that their breast change is cancer. Although the changes we investigate are often uncomfortable, painful or worrying to women, they are rarely cancer. There are many reasons for unusual breast changes, and most are not dangerous or harmful. We know you might be worried, and will try to get your results as quickly as possible.

Some women also worry about the tests they are going to have. Mammograms and ultrasounds are not dangerous and not usually uncomfortable. This sheet will give you some basic information about imaging. If you have questions before your visit, you may contact the Breast Care Nurse via the hospital's main telephone number. You are welcome to ask your specialist, nurse or radiographer questions on the day.

Mammogram

This is an x-ray of the breast. Usually, at least two pictures are taken of each breast, one breast at a time. The radiographer will position your breast firmly between two flat plates on the x-ray machine for up to a minute. This might feel uncomfortable, but if it feels painful, tell the radiographer.

Ultrasound

An ultrasound uses sound waves to give a picture of all the soft parts of the breast. The machine is like the one used to see a baby inside a womb. It is made up of a hand-held probe that looks like a microphone. This is connected to a computer. The technician or specialist will put a clear gel on your breast and then move the probe gently across the surface of each breast, stopping to take pictures.

An ultrasound usually takes about 30 minutes and is not painful.

Results of mammograms and ultrasounds

At least one specialist radiologist will look at all of the pictures from your mammogram and/or ultrasound. They will report to your specialist in the Breast Clinic.

Sometimes the pictures are not clear enough and need to be done again. At other times a specialist might mark an area on a picture for special checking. These steps are taken to make sure you get a correct diagnosis. They do not mean there is something wrong with your breast.

You will need to return for another appointment to discuss the results of your tests with a specialist. We cannot give results over the phone. With your permission, we will also notify your General Practitioner (GP) of your results.

Language link

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