

Why aren't screening mammograms recommended for women under age 40?

In general, the risk of breast cancer is very low in younger women.

- Less than 5% of all breast cancers occur in women under age 40.
- An average 30 year old woman has just a 1 in 227 chance of getting breast cancer in the next 10 years.
 - For a 40 year old, this increases to a 1 in 68 chance.
 - For a 50 year old, this increases to a 1 in 42 chance.

Mammograms aren't as effective in younger women.

- Breast tissue tends to be more dense in younger women, which makes mammograms tricky to read correctly.

Medical experts agree that the potential harms of screening women under age 40 with mammograms outweigh the potential benefits.

- The low risk of developing breast cancer at a young age does not justify the radiation exposure from screening mammograms.
- There is a much greater probability of getting a *false positive* screening result in younger women. A *false positive* is a screening result that requires further testing but is later found not to be cancer. False positive results lead to more radiation exposure through additional mammograms as well as unnecessary invasive procedures.
- There is also a greater likelihood of finding tumors that are not dangerous. This can result in *overtreatment* with radiation, surgery, and chemotherapy.

Some women have a higher risk of breast cancer because of their family history or other risk factors. Talk with your health care provider about your personal risk and an appropriate screening schedule for you.

Regardless of age or screening schedule, symptoms should never be ignored. If you notice changes in your nipples, breasts, or the surrounding skin and tissue, talk with your health care provider right away.