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Breast ultrasound

Breast ultrasound is a test that uses sound waves to examine the breasts.

How the Test is Performed

You will be asked to undress from the waist up. You will be given a gown to wear.

During the test, you will lie on your back on an examining table.

Your health care provider will place a gel on the skin of your breast. A handheld device, called a transducer, is moved over the breast area. You may be asked to raise your arms above your head and turn to the left or right.

The device sends sound waves to the breast tissue. The sound waves help create a picture that can be seen on a computer screen on the ultrasound machine.

The number of people involved in the test will be limited to protect your privacy.

How to Prepare for the Test

You may want to wear a two-piece outfit, so you do not have to completely undress.

A mammogram may be needed either before or after the exam. Do not use any lotion or powder on your breasts on the day of the exam. Do not use deodorant under your arms. Remove any jewelry from your neck and chest area.

How the Test will Feel

This test usually does not cause any discomfort, although the gel may feel cool.

Why the Test is Performed

Breast ultrasound is usually ordered when more information is needed after other tests are done or as a stand-alone test. These tests may include mammogram or breast MRI.

Your provider may order this test if you have:

- A breast lump found during a breast exam
- An abnormal mammogram
- Clear or bloody nipple discharge

A breast ultrasound can:

- Help tell the difference between a solid mass or a cyst
- Help look for a growth if you have clear or bloody fluid coming from your nipple
- Guide a needle during a breast biopsy

Normal Results

A normal result means the breast tissue appears normal.

What Abnormal Results Mean

Ultrasound can help show noncancerous growths such as:

- Cysts, which are fluid-filled sacs
- Fibroadenomas, which are noncancerous solid growths
- Lipomas, which are noncancerous fatty lumps that can occur anywhere in the body, including the breasts

Breast cancers can also be seen with ultrasound.

Follow-up tests to determine whether treatment may be needed include:

- Open (surgical or excisional) breast biopsy
- Stereotactic breast biopsy (needle biopsy performed using a machine like a mammogram)
- Ultrasound-guided breast biopsy (needle biopsy performed using ultrasound)

Risks

There are no risks associated with breast ultrasound. There is no radiation exposure.

Alternative Names

Ultrasonography of the breast; Sonogram of the breast; Breast lump - ultrasound

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