

Title:

Increasing Accuracy and Patient Comfort With Digital Mammography

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Summary:

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Keywords:

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Article Body:

There's encouraging news for women. Not only is it becoming easier to catch and treat breast cancer in its earliest stages, but new technologies are making the process of diagnosing the disease more comfortable for the patient-and more accurate as well.

The National Cancer Institute recommends mammography screenings every one to two years for women over 40 and annually for women over 50. In addition, women at high risk of developing breast cancer (for example, women with a strong family history of breast cancer or who test positive for the BRCA breast cancer gene) are encouraged to begin annual mammography screenings even earlier-sometimes as young as 25-and should consult a physician.

Benefits and risks

• Early detection of small breast cancers greatly improves a woman's chances for successful treatment. If breast cancer is caught and treated while it is still confined to the breast ducts, the cure rate is close to 100 percent.

• Clinical studies in the U.S., Sweden and the Netherlands have suggested that deaths from breast cancer could be cut by between 36 and 44 percent if screening mammography were performed annually on all women in their 40s.

Digital mammography

One of the most recent advances in breast cancer screening is digital

mammography. Digital mammography uses essentially the same system as conventional mammography, but is equipped with a digital receptor and a computer instead of a film cassette.

Digital mammography systems such as Siemens Medical Solutions' Mammomat® NovationDR enable faster and more accurate viewing of the dense tissue of the breast. Images are acquired digitally and displayed immediately on the system monitor.

According to a recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, digital mammography was significantly better than conventional mammography at screening women in any of the following categories:

- under age 50;

- any age with very dense or extremely dense breasts; or

- pre- or perimenopausal women of any age.