

Why Mammograms Are the Most Important Thing You Can Do for Your Health

You already know it's important to watch your sugar intake and get plenty of veggies, but what about when it comes to getting your recommended yearly screenings? Experts recommend women see their family doctor annually for a regular physical as well as their OBGYN for a yearly pelvic exam and any other tests — like HPV and STD screening — that may be due. But if you're [over the age of 45](#), it's also important to get an annual mammogram, and here's why.

Breast Cancer Is the Second Most Common Cancer in Women

Coming in only behind skin cancer, breast cancer is one of the biggest cancer risks that women face. According to [BreastCancer.org](#), 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer at some point in their lives. Like with any cancer, early detection plays a major role in survival rates, and that's where mammograms come in.

Screening Mammography Has Reduced the Breast Cancer Mortality Rate

According to Dr. Sandra M. Swain, president of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, mammograms play an important role in making sure women are screened and diagnosed early. Women who are diagnosed after age 50 have a mortality rate around 20 to 30 percent, but women who are diagnosed from age 40 to 50 have a 15 percent lower mortality rate. In fact, mammograms have been credited with reducing the overall breast cancer mortality rate by up to [40 percent](#) since 1990.

Family History Isn't the Only Piece of the Puzzle

It can be tempting to skip a sometimes uncomfortable screening if you don't have a family history of breast cancer, but approximately 75 percent of women who are diagnosed have no family history. This is why the current recommendations have every woman starting screening mammography by age 45, but as early as age 40 if the woman chooses.

While there is a small risk of a false positive reading leading to unnecessary biopsies, advances in mammography technology has decreased error rates, and the risks of the mammogram itself are extremely minimal. Screening mammograms are also covered under the Affordable Health Care Act (although further testing and diagnostic imagery may not be), which makes this simple test a crucial piece of your yearly health care routine.