

Mammogram confusion

Information on new screening guidelines



We've all heard that early detection of breast cancer with mammograms saves lives. So it was surprising when in 2009, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF)—an independent panel that makes recommendations about which preventive services should routinely be offered and to whom—recommended against routine mammograms for women ages 40 to 49 who weren't at increased risk for breast cancer. Traditionally, all women ages 40 and older were encouraged to get the screening.

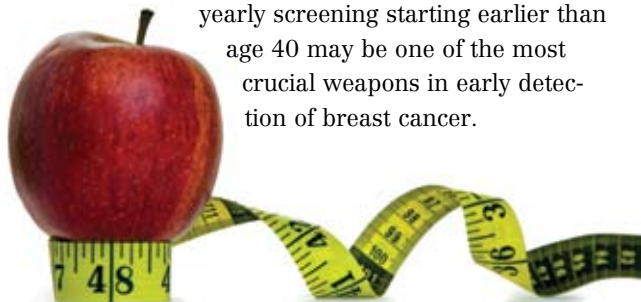
THE FLIP SIDE

In disagreement with the USPSTF's recommendations were major professional health care organizations including the American Cancer Society. "I have tremendous difficulty in not recommending an intervention [mammography]," says Otis Brawley, M.D., chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society. "Women ages 40 and older should have a mammogram every year."

NOW WHAT DO I DO?

Amid the confusion, you may be wondering about how to approach your own mammogram. Some words of advice: Talk with your physician.

The USPSTF's recommendations were just that—recommendations, not rules. Discuss your personal and family health history and how frequently you should get mammograms with your physician. And, if you're at high risk—see *Are you at risk?* at right—a yearly screening starting earlier than age 40 may be one of the most crucial weapons in early detection of breast cancer.



Mammogram comfort

Try these tips for a more comfortable mammogram, courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Don't schedule your mammogram for the week before or during your period, which is when your breasts are likely to be tender or swollen, making mammograms less comfortable.
- Skip the deodorant, perfume and powder on the day of your mammogram. These may show up as white spots on the X-ray.
- For ease of undressing from the waist up, wear a blouse with a skirt or pants, instead of a dress.

Are you at risk?

According to the National Institutes of Health, breast cancer will affect one in eight women in their lifetime. Why breast cancer affects some women and not others isn't known; however, several known risk factors for the disease include:

- increasing age
- having the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes; if your family members have had breast or ovarian cancer, talk with your physician about getting tested
- starting your period before age 12 or going through menopause after age 55
- being overweight
- using menopausal hormone therapy
- taking birth control pills
- drinking alcohol
- not having children or having your first child after age 35
- having dense breasts

Early detection saves lives!

Digital mammograms come to SMMC

Breast cancer often makes itself known in its early stages, when there's a good chance for a cure.

Women who undergo routine mammograms at Scenic Mountain Medical Center (SMMC) get the benefit of advanced diagnostic technology—digital mammography.

"We're excited to offer this technology," says Vivian Gordon, M.B.A.,

R.T.(R)(M)(ARRT), SMMC radiology director.

"It allows us to offer our patients mammograms with the least possible hassle and disruption to their lives."



Vivian Gordon, M.B.A.,
R.T.(R)(M)(ARRT)

DIGITAL BENEFITS

While digital imaging feels almost identical to conventional screening from the patient's perspective, digital mammography has several benefits, including shorter exam times and a significant reduction in callbacks for more images. With digital mammography, the radiologist reviews electronic images of the breast using high-resolution monitors. These images can be transmitted quickly and easily stored, copied and received.

SMMC has also added a digital computer-aided detection (CAD) system, which highlights common characteristics of breast cancer, including masses, clusters of microcalcifications and changes in breast tissue. "Digital CAD is like a second set of eyes to support and enhance the radiologist's judgment," says Gordon.

Make your commitment to early detection today by scheduling a mammogram if you're due, and by encouraging your friends to do the same. SMMC is committed to providing quality breast care, close to home. To learn more about mammograms, see page 3 of this issue.

! Go digital with SMMC

Get screened! To make an appointment for digital mammography, call (432) 264-0602.