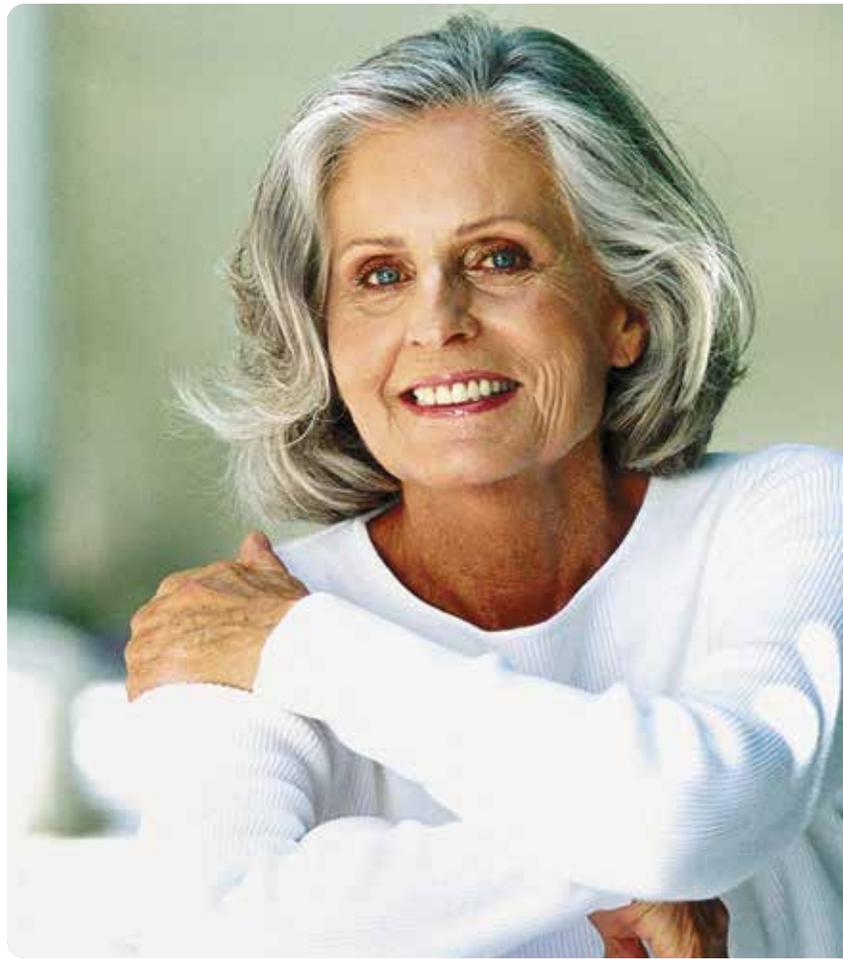


A Woman's Guide to Educated Breast Health



Women's Imaging

IMAGING HEALTHCARE SPECIALISTS



Digital Mammography

Digital mammography (sometimes referred to as full-field digital mammography) is one of the most recent advances in x-ray mammography. It is redefining the way women's healthcare is delivered and provides a new option in breast health. Similar to standard mammography, x-rays are used to produce an image of the breast. The key role of digital mammography is to identify breast cancer in its early stages when it is very small. This is often a year or two before it is large enough to be felt by your healthcare provider. Mammography detects about 2–3 times as many early breast cancers as a physical examination.

The differences between standard and digital mammography are the way the images are recorded, viewed by the radiologist, and stored. Standard mammogram images are recorded on x-ray film. Digital mammography images are captured electronically and viewable on a computer screen within 8–10 seconds. They are stored on the computer and therefore their magnification, brightness, darkness or contrast can be “enhanced” after the mammogram is complete to help the doctor more clearly see certain areas. Because the images can be adjusted by the radiologist, subtle differences between tissues may be noted. Many times the differences between digital mammography and standard mammography are compared to the differences between a digital camera and a camera using regular film. With a digital camera, you put the pictures in your computer and are able to adjust how light or dark they are and even make them larger. With a regular camera, you have film that is converted into a picture “hard copy”, but the ability to adjust the image is not as easy. The digital images can also be transmitted over phone lines to another healthcare provider (breast specialist) for consultation.

Early in 2000, the FDA approved the “full-field” digital mammogram system that can now be used for routine breast cancer screening. It is possible that digital mammography will eventually replace traditional mammography.

The Advantages of Digital Mammography Include:

- Improved contrasts between dense and non-dense breast tissue
- Faster image time, thus less radiation exposure
- Shorter exam time, reducing anxiety as pictures are generated immediately
- Easier image storage
- Physician manipulation of breast images for more accurate detection of breast cancer
- Ability to correct under or over exposed films without having to repeat the mammogram
- Ease of transmission of images from one physician to another
- Fewer patient call-backs for additional views

