

What is a Breast MRI?

MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) is a painless technology that uses radio waves, powerful magnets, and a computer to create detailed images of areas inside your body.

A breast MRI produces hundreds of images from many angles. These images can clearly show the difference between normal and cancerous breast tissue. Unlike a mammogram, an MRI does not expose you to any radiation.

Is a Breast MRI Right for You?

It is recommended that women at high risk (20% or higher) for developing breast cancer over their lifetime have both a screening breast MRI and a screening mammogram every year.

Women at average risk (13%) for breast cancer are usually recommended for a breast MRI only if they have:

- Very dense breast tissue
- Scar tissue from a past lumpectomy
- Breast implants that might be leaking
- A lump that can be felt but not seen on mammogram or ultrasound
- Other specific breast health issues

Three Steps to Healthy Breasts

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women in the United States. When found early, there are many life-saving treatments. Over 90% of breast cancers can be detected by following a simple three-step program:

Step 1 Monthly Breast Self-Exam (BSE)

- Starting in your 20s, check your breasts for changes, lumps or abnormalities.
- You can do a self-exam in the shower, looking in a mirror, or lying down.
- If you notice any changes in your breasts, call your health care provider right away.
- Learn how to do a BSE online at www.nationalbreastcancer.org/breast-self-exam.

Step 2 Clinical Breast Exam (CBE)

- A physical breast exam done by a qualified health provider.
- If you are in your 20s or 30s you should have an exam every three years.
- If you are age 40 or older you should have an exam every year.

Step 3 Mammography

A mammogram is the best breast cancer screening test for most women. If you are at average risk for breast cancer (13% over your lifetime), the American Cancer Society recommends:

- **At age 40-44.** You can choose to start having a yearly mammogram.
- **At age 45-54.** You should have a mammogram every year.
- **At age 55 and older.** You can choose to have a mammogram every year or every other year.

If you're at **high risk** (20% or higher), your health care provider will want you to begin screening at an earlier age. Because younger women can have denser breast tissue, an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) breast screening may also be recommended.

Breast MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging)

A Quick Guide to
Smart Breast Health



Understanding Breast MRI

Magnetic resonance imaging of the breast (breast MRI) is used to find breast cancer and other breast abnormalities. But this test is not for everyone. Like many medical procedures, breast MRI technology offers both advantages and disadvantages. Your health care provider will consider your medical history, past test results, and other factors before recommending a breast MRI.

Breast MRI won't replace a mammogram or other breast screening procedures. Even though it is a sensitive test, an MRI may miss some breast cancers that can be seen on a mammogram.

Ask your health care provider about your individual risk for developing breast cancer and which screening tests are right for you.

Who Should Have a Breast MRI

Most women have about a 13% risk of developing breast cancer over their lifetime. This is called **average risk**. If breast cancer runs in your family, you have specific gene mutations or disorders, and/or had radiation treatment to your chest area when you were age 10-30, your risk will be higher than average.

Women with higher than 20% lifetime risk of getting breast cancer are considered to be at **high risk**. The American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends that high risk women have a breast MRI and a mammogram every year, starting at age 30.

Other Uses for Breast MRI

In addition to women in the high risk category, your health care provider may recommend a breast MRI in the following situations:

- You are at moderate risk (15-20%) for cancer based on your family history
- You have extremely dense tissue in your breasts
- You may have a rupture or leakage in a breast implant
- To find the primary tumor if cancer has spread to armpit lymph nodes
- To detect any residual cancer after a lumpectomy
- After a breast cancer diagnosis—to see if there are other suspicious areas in your breast before surgery

Before You Schedule

Be sure to check with your insurance company first. Because MRIs are expensive, you may need special authorization for insurance to pay for the procedure.

What to Expect

Once your MRI is approved and scheduled, there is no special preparation. You'll change into a gown before the exam and will need to remove all metal objects (jewelry, hair clips, dental work, etc.). Many MRI exams use a contrast dye that is injected into a vein in your hand or arm. The contrast dye improves the detail and clarity of the MRI images of your breast. Breast MRIs usually last about one hour.

During your exam:

- You will lie face down on a narrow padded table
- Your breasts will be positioned down through openings in the table
- Once you are set, the table will slide into a long, narrow cylinder
- You'll hear some sounds and will need to hold your breath at times
- After the first set of images, contrast dye may be injected before more images are taken
- After your exam, the radiologist will analyze the images and send the results to your health care provider

Breast MRI: Limitations

- More expensive and time-consuming than a mammogram or breast ultrasound
- Not all hospitals and imaging centers have dedicated breast MRI equipment
- Doesn't detect very small calcifications that can indicate early breast cancer
- Often doesn't distinguish between cancerous and non-cancerous tumors
- May lead to unnecessary biopsy procedures



Courtesy of Phillips

