

Should you get mammograms before age 50?

Deciding whether to start having mammograms before age 50 can be difficult and confusing.

Here are a few things to consider:

For women aged 40–49 without any risk factors, the chance of developing breast cancer is low compared to women over 50. The actual risk of dying from breast cancer for women in this age group is 3–4 in 1,000 women over 10 years.

The types of breast cancer found in women under 50 can vary. Some cancers in this age group cause no symptoms and are not life threatening, while others are more aggressive and fast growing. Mammograms cannot tell us which cancers will become life threatening.

Test results in younger women can be less accurate and may show something suspicious that doesn't turn out to be cancer. This can lead to treatment and follow-up tests that aren't necessary, like breast biopsies.

We encourage you to visit our website at ghc.org for more information, and to talk with your doctor. You can discuss your health history together and make a decision that's right for you.

If you choose to have mammograms:

If you are aged 40–49 and choose to have mammograms, they are covered by the preventive services care benefit in your coverage agreement.

Scheduling your mammogram

If you need to schedule a mammogram, please call Member Services to find the breast center closest to you: toll-free at 1-888-901-4636.

Where can I get more information?

Visit our Health and Wellness Resources section at kp.org/wa for more information about breast cancer screening.

Breast Cancer Screening

- Breast cancer risk factors
- How to decide when to start getting mammograms
- Recommended screening schedule

What is a screening mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. It is used to look for breast cancer in women before changes in the breast are seen or felt. While mammograms don't prevent breast cancer, they are the most effective test for finding breast cancer early, before it spreads to other parts of the body.

Know and understand your health history

Family and personal health histories help your care team provide care that meets your needs, including recommended screenings that can help find cancer early.

The following checklist includes things that increase your risk of breast cancer. These things are called risk factors.

Check any of the things on the list that are true for you. Then look at the information to the right of the list to see when you should get mammograms based on your age and risk factors.

Risk factors

☒ Check if true for you

You've had:

- ☐ Breast or ovarian cancer
- ☐ Breast biopsy—talk to your doctor about your results to find out if you're at increased risk
- ☐ Radiation therapy to your chest between the ages of 10 and 30

You have a family history:

- ☐ Mother, sister, or daughter with any of the following:
 - breast cancer before age 50
 - breast cancer in both breasts at any age
 - breast and ovarian cancer
- ☐ Two (2) or more aunts or grandmothers on the same side of the family with breast cancer before age 50
- ☐ Three (3) or more relatives with breast cancer (mother, sister, daughter, aunt, grandmother)
- ☐ One relative with ovarian cancer and another relative with breast cancer on the same side of the family (mother, daughter, sister, aunt, grandmother)
- ☐ Male relative with breast cancer
- ☐ One relative with breast or ovarian cancer and you are of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage

How often should you get mammograms?

Our recommendations for mammograms depend on your age and risk factors (items listed in the checklist).

For women who've had breast or ovarian cancer:

We recommend mammograms every year, or as recommended by your doctor.

For women aged 40–49:

If you checked any of the items, we recommend mammograms every year. If you didn't check any items, the decision to start screening before age 50 is yours. There are things to consider in getting mammograms before age 50. For more information, see “Should you get mammograms before age 50?” on the next panel.

For women aged 50–74:

If you checked any items, we recommend mammograms every year. If you didn't check any items, we recommend mammograms every 2 years.

For women aged 75 and older:

A decision to continue or stop mammograms should be based on your personal preference and situation. Please talk with your doctor about your need for screening.

If you have breast implants:

Screening recommendations are the same as outlined above.