

Mammography May Benefit Women Aged 40 to 49

A large Swedish study found that women who received screening mammography between ages 40 and 49 were 26% less likely to die from breast cancer than women who did not have such screening. Mammography is a type of x-ray specifically designed to find small tumors or abnormal areas in the breast.

Many studies have shown that screening mammography reduces the number of deaths from breast cancer for women 50 and older; however, there are few that show a benefit for mammography for women younger than 50. In fact, a 2009 report by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommended against regular mammography screening for women younger than 50 for this reason. However, many health organizations still support screening for younger women.

Since 1986, the Swedish government has called for mammography screening for women ages 50 to 69, but the government left it up to the individual counties to decide whether or not to offer mammography to women age 40 to 49. About half of Swedish counties offer mammography for women age 40 to 49 and about half do not offer screening. In this study, researchers compared the number of deaths from 1986 to 2005 for women age 40 to 49 who were offered screening mammography compared with women of this age group who were not offered mammography until age 50.

What this means for patients

The benefits from routine screening mammography for younger women have been argued since the 1980s, said lead author Håkan Jonsson, PhD, Associate Professor of Cancer Epidemiology at Umea University in Umea, Sweden. We're hoping that large population-based studies will help provide more answers. If you are younger than 50, it's important to talk with your doctor about your risk of breast cancer. Depending on your risk, your doctor may recommend screening at a younger age.

What to ask your doctor

- What is my risk of breast cancer?
- When should I begin having screening tests for breast cancer?
- What screening tests do you recommend?
- What are the risks and benefits of mammography?
- What further tests are necessary if the test results are unclear or indicate cancer?

For More Information

[Guide to Breast Cancer](#) [1]

[Cancer Screening](#) [2]

[Mammography - What to Expect](#)
[3]

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18618>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24972>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24584>