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Bone Scan, Liver Ultrasound, and Chest X-Ray Not Helpful for Women With a Low Risk of Metastatic Breast Cancer

In a recent review of previous studies, researchers found that bone scans, liver ultrasounds, and chest x-rays are not good tests for finding cancer that has spread for women newly diagnosed with breast cancer who have no symptoms of the disease. Bone scans, liver ultrasounds, and chest x-rays are called imaging tests and are used to create pictures of the inside of the body. These tests are often used to find possible metastases (areas where cancer has spread), but there is no standard procedure or solid evidence that they are beneficial in this situation.

For this study, researchers combined the information from eight previous studies and found that regular screening for metastases with these three tests did not result in the detection of metastases. For women newly diagnosed with stage I and II breast cancer, about 2% of metastases were found with bone scan and less than 1% were found with liver ultrasound and chest X-ray. For women with stage III cancer, about 13% of metastases were found with bone scan, 4% were found with liver ultrasound, and 5% were found with chest x-ray.

What this means for patients

?Our study suggests that these three tests are of little use for screening women with early-stage disease for metastases. But a comparison of these tests with more sensitive imaging tests, such computed tomography and positron emission tomography scans, would be needed to know more.? said study author Stuart-Allison Moffat Staley, MPH, a medical student at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. It?s important to talk with your doctor about any tests you may need and why. Weighing the benefits of certain tests with the risks and the costs is different for each patient.

Questions to ask your doctor

- What stage of breast cancer do I have?
- What is the chance the cancer has spread?
- What additional tests will I need?
- How will each test help you understand my cancer better?

For More Information

Guide to Breast Cancer [1]

Choosing Wisely®: Top Five Cancer-Related Tests, Procedures, and Treatments That Many Patients Do Not Need[2]

Bone Scan ? What to Expect [3]

Ultrasound ? What to Expect [4]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/node/18618
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/26096
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24410
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24714