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INSPIRING HEALTH
Comprehensive medical centre

MAMMOGRAPHY SCANS



Q. What is a mammogram?

A. A mammogram is a specialised x-ray of the breast which shows small details of the breast tissue that cannot be seen in any other way. Mammograms are carried out by a female radiographer that has been specially trained in the technique.

Q. Who is recommended for a mammogram?

A. Health officials recommend that women aged 50-69 years have breast screening mammograms once every two years. Women aged 40-49 years who choose to have a screening mammogram usually have it done once a year. You are not recommended to have a mammogram while below the age of 40 years. This is because you are at low risk of having breast cancer at this age and also due to poorer image quality at that age.

Q. Why should I have this procedure?

A. There are two reasons why mammograms are recommended:

Screening: This is when women participate on a routine basis to have mammograms to find any breast cancer at an early stage. This type of mammogram looks for signs that breast cancer may be developing, even though no symptoms are there.

Diagnostic: This is typically done to check for breast cancer after a lump has been found or any sign and symptom has been noted such as pain, skin thickening, nipple discharge, nipple retraction or a change in breast size or shape. It may also be used as a secondary test if a screening mammogram finds something that is not normal. Mammograms are reviewed by radiologists and radiographers that are specially trained to perform and interpret the results.

Q. Are mammograms safe?

A. Mammograms involve exposure to x-rays and x-ray radiation has been found to cause cancer.

The amount of radiation you receive during one screening mammogram will be based on:

1. The amount of fat in your breast tissue (density) ;and
2. The number of images taken.

Your total exposure to radiation from screening mammograms will depend on the number of mammograms you have had.

X-ray technologists (radiographers) are experts in breast positioning and know how to reduce the amount of radiation you receive.

The amount of radiation that you get from a screening mammogram is almost the same as the amount you would receive over 3 months from your usual surroundings (e.g. sun, rocks, soil, buildings, air and food).

Studies show that the risk of a new cancer starting due to radiation to the breast from breast screening mammography is extremely low. The benefits of early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer far outweigh the risk of being exposed to the small amount of radiation from a screening mammogram.

If you do have a breast lump or significant problem, the risk of not having the examination will be much greater than the risk associated with the radiation dose.

Q. Are there any alternatives?

A. If you are pregnant, think you might be pregnant, or are currently breastfeeding, it is essential that you inform a radiographer as soon as you receive your appointment. This is so that the radiographer can assess whether an alternative investigation (such as an ultrasound scan that may be more appropriate). You can contact the department on the numbers given in this leaflet.

Q. How can I prepare for a mammogram?

A. There are no special preparations required for this procedure.

You can eat and drink normally before and after.

However:

1. It is advisable to wear clothes that can be easily removed, as you will be asked to undress from the waist upwards.
2. If you have breast implants, please inform the radiographer when you arrive for your appointment.
3. Do not wear deodorant, powder, lotion or perfume on your breasts and underarm areas on the day of your appointment, as these will affect the x-ray image.
4. Do not schedule your mammogram in the week before your menstrual period if your breasts are usually tender during this time. The best time for a mammogram is one week following your period.

Q. What happens during the procedure?

A. The procedure should last no longer than 15 minutes. The radiographer will ask you a few questions about your general health and explain the procedure to you.

If you have any additional questions, she will be more than happy to answer them for you. Once all of the questions have been answered, the radiographer will ask you to remove all of your clothes from the waist up.

She will then get you to stand in front of the x-ray machine where she will position you for your mammogram. Each breast, in turn, will be placed on to the x-ray machine and firmly compressed by a clear plate. The compression will only last a few seconds and does not cause any harm to the breasts. Compression is needed to keep the breast still and to get the clearest picture with the lowest amount of radiation possible.

Usually two images are taken of each breast but if your breasts are larger than average, it may be necessary to take more than two images of each breast.

Q. Will I feel any pain?

A. Some women find compression slightly uncomfortable and some feel short-lived pain.

Research has shown that many women regard a mammogram as less painful than having a blood test, and find that the compression compares to having their blood pressure measured.

Q. What happens after the procedure?

A. The mammogram images will be reviewed by a consultant radiologist and a report will be issued to the doctor that referred you. This process takes approximately 1-2hrs.

Sometimes it is necessary to call you back for a further mammogram to examine any areas of change in the breast more closely. This is quite common and although it may seem alarming at the time, it is a normal procedure to help produce the most accurate report possible.

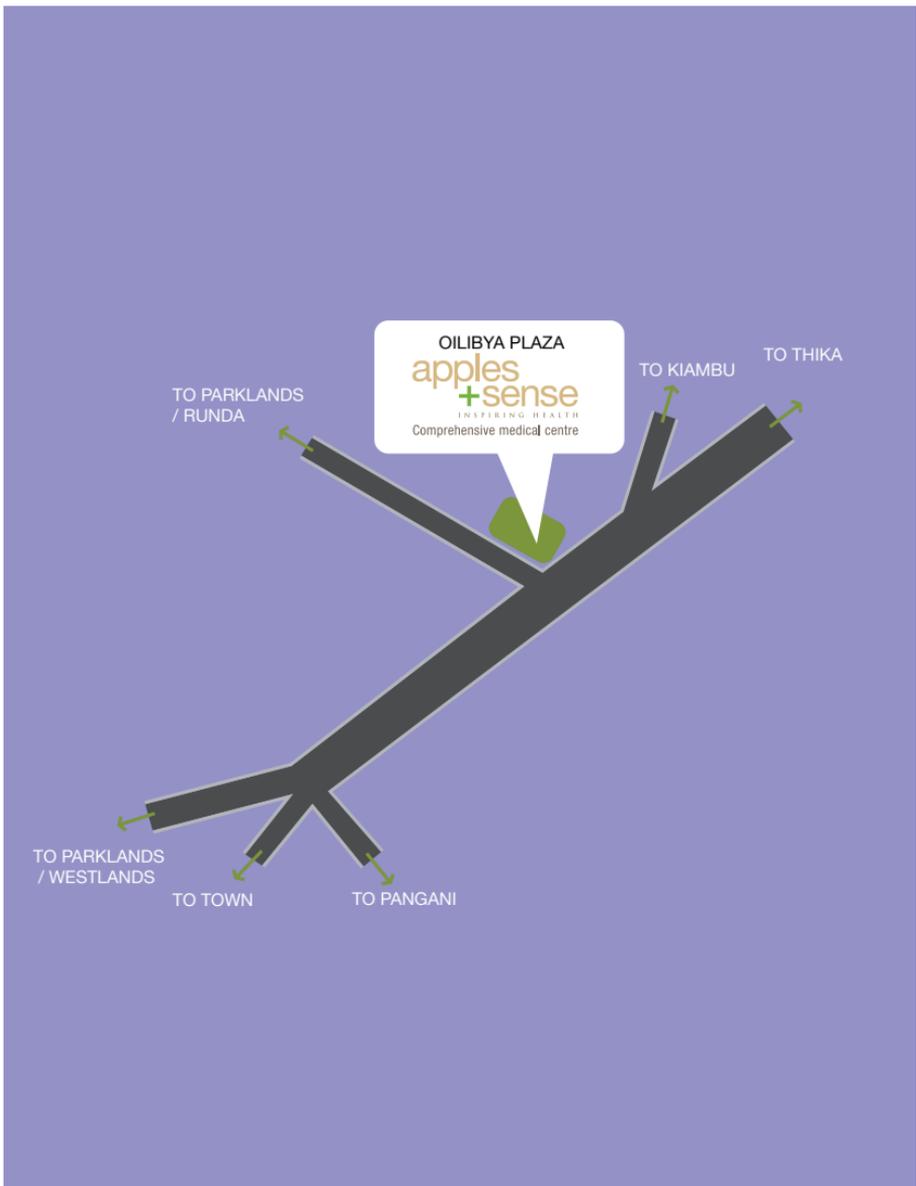
Q. What do I need to do after I go home?

A. You can go back to normal activity, including work and sports, straight away.

Q. What should I do if I have a problem?

A. Following a mammogram you should not have any adverse after-effects to cause concern. However, we have included our contact numbers in this leaflet if you feel you need any advice.





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