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What is a mammogram?

- A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast. It is used to detect breast changes in women who have no signs or symptoms of breast cancer.

When does the National Cancer Institute (NCI) recommend that women have screening mammograms?

- Women age 40 and older should have mammograms every 1 to 2 years.
- Women who are at higher than average risk of breast cancer should talk with their health care providers about whether to have mammograms before age 40 and how often to have them.

What is the best method of detecting breast cancer as early as possible?

- Getting a high-quality mammogram and having a clinical breast exam (an exam done by a health care provider) on a regular basis are the most effective ways to detect breast cancer early. Like any test, mammograms have both benefits and limitations. For example, some cancers cannot be detected by a mammogram, but may be found by breast examination.

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What are the benefits of screening mammograms?

- Several large studies conducted around the world show that breast cancer screening with mammograms reduces the number of deaths from breast cancer for women ages 40 to 69, especially those over age 50.

This Mother's Day, talk to your mother, your daughter, your sister, and your friends about scheduling a yearly mammogram. Talk to your doctor about scheduling one today!

- For information on low-cost reproductive health resources, visit www.commongroundclinic.org – click on resource guides, and then on city-wide or women's resource guide.

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What are factors that place a woman at increased risk of breast cancer?

- The risk of breast cancer increases gradually as a woman gets older, however, the risk of developing breast cancer is not the same for all women. These factors are proven to *increase* risk:
 - **Personal history of breast cancer**
 - **Family history**—A woman's chance of developing breast cancer increases if her mother, sister, and/or daughter have a history of breast cancer (especially if they were diagnosed before age 50).
 - **Reproductive and menstrual history**—Women who began having periods before age 12 or went through menopause after age 55 are at an increased risk of developing breast cancer. Women who have their first child after age 30 or who never have a child are at an increased risk of developing breast cancer.
 - **Body weight and Physical Activity**—Studies have found that the chance of getting breast cancer after menopause is higher in women who are overweight or obese. Women who are physically inactive throughout life may have an increased risk of breast cancer. Being active may help reduce risk by preventing weight gain and obesity.
 - **Alcohol**—Studies suggest that the more alcohol a woman drinks, the greater her risk of breast cancer.

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Where can I get a mammogram in New Orleans?

- If you see a regular doctor, talk to them about what is covered by your insurance. This might include Tulane Hospital and Touro Hospital facilities.
- Low-Cost options include:
 - **LA Breast and Cervical Health Program**, 1.888.599.1073
 - 1615 Poydras St Ste 1400, New Orleans, M-F, 8-4:30
 - Provides referrals for free breast exams, pelvic exams, PAP smears and mammograms to qualifying low-income women age 40-64. Free, *Spanish spoken? Y, Se habla espanol*
 - **St. Thomas Breast Imaging Center**, 504-529-5560
 - 1020 St. Andrew, New Orleans, M-Th 8-12 & 1-4; F 8-12
 - Mammograms for women ages 40-65. Free, *Spanish spoken? Y, Se habla espanol*

What is a Pap smear?

- A Pap smear is a test your doctor does to check for signs of cancer of the cervix. The cervix is part of your uterus (womb). During a Pap smear, your doctor takes a sample of cells from your cervix to be tested and examined.
- To take the sample, your doctor will put a special instrument called a speculum into your vagina. This helps open your vagina so the sample can be taken. Your doctor will gently clean your cervix with a cotton swab and then collect a sample of cells with a small brush, a tiny spatula or a cotton swab. This sample is put on a glass slide and sent to a lab to be checked under a microscope.

Talk to your doctor about scheduling a Pap smear, or check out your local low-cost clinic for more options.

- You should have your first Pap smear when you start having sex or by age 18.
- Continue having a Pap smear once a year until you've had at least 3 normal ones. After this, you should have a Pap smear at least every 3 years, unless your doctor thinks you need them more often. Keep having Pap smears throughout your life, even after you've gone through menopause.