What is the difference between a screening mammogram and a diagnostic mammogram?

A screening mammogram is your annual mammogram that is done every year. Sometimes the radiologist may ask you to come back for follow-up images; this is called a diagnostic mammogram, and it is to rule out any unclear areas in the breast or if there is a breast complaint that needs to be evaluated.

Who should have a 3D mammogram?

3D mammography is an excellent screening and diagnostic tool for all patients, but it is especially helpful for younger women or women with very dense breasts.

On mammograms, breast tissue can appear different depending on the proportion of fatty and glandular tissue. When your breasts are dense, they have more glandular tissue. This is quite common; up to 50 percent of women have dense breast tissue. For more information, visit www.breast.massrad.org.

During the exam:

A 3D mammogram is very similar to a traditional mammogram and takes approximately the same amount of time. A technologist positions you in the same way, and your breast is compressed under a paddle while images are taken from different angles. This may be uncomfortable, but it is not painful. An X-ray arm of the mammography machine also makes a quick arc over the breast, taking a series of images from several angles. A radiologist then examines the digital images for abnormalities. For a routine mammogram, you can plan to be in and out of the facility within 30 minutes.

After the exam:

After your 3D mammogram is complete, our radiologists will interpret your images. You will receive your results within a few days. A copy of the report is also sent directly to your physician(s).

Why is 3D mammography a better option?

The benefits of 3D mammography are that it allows the radiologist to examine breast tissue one layer at a time and to see a level of detail never before possible, including fine variations and details because they are no longer hidden by the breast tissue above and below. Breast cancer screening with 3D, when combined with a conventional mammogram, has a higher cancer detection rate than conventional mammography alone. Studies show that this technology improves detection of breast cancers and has a significant reduction in callback rates.

Does 3D mammography expose me to radiation?

It’s important to remember that mammograms are quick, easy, and safe and use less radiation than a dentist’s X-ray. While adding tomosynthesis does involve a minimal amount of additional radiation compared with the standard digital mammogram, the radiation dose for the combined standard mammogram and tomosynthesis is under the FDA regulated limit for standard mammography.

What does 3D mammography cost?

At Lowell General Hospital, our policy is to provide our 3D mammography services to all our patients regardless of their type of insurance coverage. Depending on your plan, your insurance may cover all or a portion of the payment for a 3D screening mammogram. If your insurance doesn’t cover 3D mammography, Lowell General Hospital will waive the cost of the specific 3D mammogram charge.

Preparing for your exam:

Before your appointment:

- Please preregister for your appointment by calling 978.937.6023, Monday - Friday, 7:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.
- Obtain copies of any recent films from mammograms performed at another facility to bring to the exam

On the day of your mammogram:

- Do not use deodorant, talcum powder, lotion, or other substances under your arms or on your breasts
- Wearing a two-piece outfit is suggested so you need to remove only your top for the exam

Women’s Imaging Services at Lowell General Hospital possesses a valid license and certificate of inspection issued by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.
What Is 3D Mammography?

3D mammography, or tomosynthesis, is a type of technology that has been shown to increase the rate of detection of breast cancer. Unlike conventional mammography, which takes a picture of the entire breast in one exposure, 3D mammography takes pictures from multiple angles and uses computer processing to build those pictures into a 3D image similar to a movie. These 3D images help detect lumps that are otherwise hidden by overlapping breast tissue.

3D mammography is an excellent screening and diagnostic tool for all patients, but it is especially helpful for younger women or women with very dense breasts. Lowell General Hospital offers 3D technology at every location that offers mammography services, so our patients are guaranteed the most advanced mammography available.

You do not need a written order from your doctor for a screening mammogram. Starting at 40, annual screening mammograms are recommended. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network recommends a baseline mammogram for women of average risk at age 40, with routine mammograms recommended annually after age 40. Your personal and family medical history will also determine how often you should have a mammogram, so be sure to talk to your doctor.

You can schedule online at lowellgeneral.org/mammogram.

To schedule an appointment:

lowellgeneral.org/mammogram
or 978.937.6023
Scheduling hours of operation: 8:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.