

VCU Health Breast Imaging Offers 3-D Mammograms!

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is a 3-D Mammogram?

A 3-D mammogram is often times referred to as breast tomosynthesis or 3-D mammography. The 3-D mammogram is a newer type of mammogram that puts digital images of your breast together into a 3-dimensional picture.

What are the benefits of a 3-D Mammogram?

3-D mammograms capture-multiple images of the breast tissue at different angles. These are put together so the doctor can look through the breast layer by layer, almost like turning pages in a book. This may make it easier to detect any areas of concern and may also reduce the need for you to have follow up imaging.

Are 3-D Mammograms safe?

3-D mammography is safe. The benefits of mammography outweigh any possible harm from the radiation exposure. Modern machines use low radiation doses to get breast x-rays that are high in image quality. While the radiation dose for a 3-D mammogram is higher than the standard or 2-D mammogram, it is still well below the limits defined by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration). It is also only a fraction of the level of radiation everyone receives annually from the natural background of being outdoors.

How is a 3-D Mammogram performed?

Women notice little difference between 3-D mammograms and 2-D mammograms. For 3-D mammograms, the tube taking the x-ray sweeps over the breast in an arc. It takes about four seconds to obtain an image, just a little bit longer than a standard or 2-D mammogram.

Am I a candidate for a 3-D Mammogram?

Unfortunately, it cannot be done on everyone. Please ask at our Registration Desk to speak with a technologist to see if 3-D mammography is right for you. Also, 3-D mammography does not replace breast ultrasound or breast MRI.

Is there an additional cost for a 3-D Mammogram and will my insurance cover it?

Even though 3-D mammography is FDA approved, currently only Medicare and a select few insurance companies cover the screening tomosynthesis (3-D) exam with no out of pocket charge to the patient. Some commercial/private insurance companies have an allowable charge for tomosynthesis and the patient may be required to pay coinsurance and deductible amounts. For information on your specific policy, please call your insurance company. Currently \$65 is collected from non-Medicare patients for the tomosynthesis portion of the mammography visit. Insurance is billed for the tomosynthesis along with the mammography and CAD (computer-aided detection) charges. The insurance company processes the claim and applies a co-insurance or deductible depending on the policy. The \$65 is applied to the patient's account and goes towards the patient's co-insurance and/or deductible for the tomosynthesis charge (which will vary depending on the policies' allowable amount for the tomosynthesis charge). The patient will be billed and/or refunded accordingly.