

FEAR A MAMMOGRAM? FOLLOW THESE TIPS.

Fear of discomfort is one reason women may choose not to have their recommended annual mammogram. Yet, there are a few simple things a woman can do to ease any possible discomfort she may feel during this brief imaging procedure.

Hold off on coffee, tea, even soft drinks

Caffeine has a tendency to make a woman's breasts tender and lumpy, potentially making the mammogram uncomfortable. Avoid drinking coffee and tea, unless it's decaffeinated, for a week prior to a mammogram. Other items containing caffeine include diet drinks, chocolate and even some common over-the-counter (OTC) pain relievers. Be sure to read the label of any OTC medications before you take them prior to a scheduled mammogram.

Steer clear of perfumes, talcum powder

Deodorant, talcum powder, perfumes and oils may leave a residue that can be picked up by the X-rays, obscuring the mammogram and possibly interfering with the results. Ultimately, this means a woman could need a second mammogram. Do not use these products on the day of the scheduled mammogram.

Avoid periods of breast tenderness

"Most women's breasts are naturally more tender or slightly swollen during the week prior to their menstrual period," says Alicia Starr M.D., medical director, Women's Imaging Center at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Plano. "Try to avoid scheduling your annual mammogram during this time."

A sensible dressing tip also makes the process a little easier: Wear a two-piece outfit with a blouse or sweater on the day of the appointment. While a woman's choice of outfit will not affect the outcome of her mammogram, most women find it easier and faster to slip off a blouse instead of removing a one-piece dress.

Mammography is a low-dose X-ray of the breast that is currently the most effective way of finding breast cancer in its earliest and most treatable stages. Any possible discomfort during a mammogram should not prevent women from scheduling this procedure. During the procedure, performed by a female radiologic technologist, a woman's breast is placed on a ledge and gently compressed in order to see all the tissue and any possible abnormalities.

Doctors recommend a baseline mammogram between age 35 and 40, and yearly mammograms starting at age 40, sometimes earlier if a woman has a family history of breast disease. In the U.S. alone, more than 250,000 people are diagnosed with breast cancer every year. But if detected at an early stage, the chances of survival are extremely high.

"Stage I breast cancer is typically very treatable—women do well," says Lynn Canavan, M.D., a breast cancer surgeon on the medical staff at Baylor Regional Medical Center at Plano.

In addition to the annual mammogram, women should perform a monthly breast self-exam beginning at age 20, and a woman's physician should perform a clinical breast exam at least every three years up to age 40 and yearly after age 40. Go to www.baylorhealth.com/PlanoWomen to learn more about breast cancer risk and treatments. To schedule a mammogram at the Women's Imaging Center at Baylor Plano, call (469)-814-5500.