

# Understanding Digital Mammography

## What is digital mammography and how is it different from film mammography?

Digital mammography is an evolving technology that captures a digital mammography image on a computer rather than traditional film. The primary advantage from a patient's standpoint is faster exam time (90 seconds-3 minutes) since the image does not have to go through a processor to be developed. The difference between digital and conventional technology is the process utilized to acquire the image. Both technologies still require breast compression.

## Do Covenant Health's breast centers offer digital mammography, and if not, when will they?

Currently, our breast centers do not use digital mammography. While digital mammography is promising technology, it has not been fully developed. The acquisition of digital mammography will come only when it has been shown to be better than the technology we currently use. As with all decisions regarding technological advances, a direct patient benefit must be demonstrated. Numerous studies are currently underway regarding the effectiveness of digital mammography, and we are monitoring the outcomes of those studies closely.

## Does digital mammography yield a better mammogram and clearer images?

In a word, no. While some area healthcare providers are advertising digital mammography as an advanced diagnostic tool, no study has been completed to date that indicates a significant difference between conventional analog (film) mammography and digital mammography with regard to image quality.



## If my physician finds a suspicious spot on my mammogram, won't digital mammography keep me from having to undergo as many x-rays?

It is possible that with digital mammography the number of extra images required for diagnosis could decrease, depending on the ability to satisfactorily manipulate the images on the computer monitor. The initial set of four images will still be necessary.

## Can a mammogram be made without compression of the breast?

Unfortunately, there is no way to have a mammogram without compression. Remember that a digital mammogram is performed exactly the same way as a film mammogram from the patient's standpoint. The only difference is that the image is converted to a digital image that can be displayed on a video monitor as opposed to a film image.



## Will private insurance companies, Medicare and TennCare pay for digital mammography?

Yes, in most cases. Check with your health care provider.

## Do I need both kinds of mammograms?

No, only one mammogram per year for screening is required, since film and digital technologies yield the same information. Either type of image will help your physician advise you on maintaining proper breast health.

## Could I get a digital mammogram instead of an ultrasound?

No, mammograms and ultrasounds are separate and distinct procedures with very specific objectives. They are not interchangeable.

## Why choose a Covenant Health breast center?

Covenant Health has five breast centers, more than 50 physicians and a host of dedicated nurses, clinicians, technologists and other specialists who deliver the most comprehensive breast health services available to almost 50,000 East Tennessee women each year. Among Covenant Health's wide array of services, mammography-enhancing technologies such as the R2 ImageChecker are available to physicians when interpreting mammogram results. This technology can increase breast cancer detection by 5-10 percent. In addition, Covenant Health is the only provider in East Tennessee to have two fellowship-trained physicians available for the diagnosis of breast disease.

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