

# When to start regular breast cancer screenings

July 3 2023, by DeeDee Stiepan

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Early detection and regular breast cancer screenings are key to reducing death from breast cancer. Mammograms remain the best tool available and have been shown to reduce deaths from breast cancer. That's why

Mayo Clinic recommends women start screening mammograms yearly at age 40. While that recommendation has been firm for the past 10 years, other institutions have shifted the recommended screening age over the years.

The latest to consider a change is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, which is proposing changing its guidelines to recommend all women begin screening mammography at age 40, a decade earlier than previous guidelines.

Dr. Sandhya Pruthi, with Mayo Clinic's Breast Diagnostic Clinic and Mayo Clinic Comprehensive Cancer Center, is pleased to see the shift.

"Mayo Clinic has always taken the stance to screen beginning age 40, every year. And I think other organizations are doing that. And these (recommendations) are now coming closer together. The importance of initiating [mammography](#) at age 40 is nice to see this happening," says Dr. Pruthi.

"We're trying to detect cancer early. Over 250,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer every year, and 40,000 women die from breast cancer every year. So our goal is to detect cancer early and improve the prognosis so we reduce deaths from breast cancer."

Women at a high risk of breast cancer, such as those who have a [family history](#) or those who have a genetic mutation that might increase their risk of developing [breast cancer](#), may need earlier and/or more frequent screening.

Dr. Pruthi encourages patients to talk with their healthcare team to identify [risk factors](#) and preferences that might change how often someone should be screened.

Dr. Pruthi also stresses the importance of breast self-awareness. She encourages women to become familiar with their breasts and if there are changes in-between regular screening mammograms, to bring this to the attention of their primary care provider.

"We have to remember that screening mammogram is for early detection in an asymptomatic individual. A diagnostic mammogram and or breast ultrasound may need to be ordered to evaluate a new breast concern. This is important because a very dense mammogram is another factor that can mask breast cancers," says Dr. Pruthi.

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Citation: When to start regular breast cancer screenings (2023, July 3) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-07-regular-breast-cancer-screenings.html>

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