Mammograms

Pre-reading
Questions: What do you know about the subject of this reading? What more would you like to learn about it?

Definitions: Tissue – a group of cells in the body Diagnostic – used in identifying the nature or cause of a disease

Reading*

According to the National Cancer Institute breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women in this country (except for skin cancer). Each year more than 211,000 American women learn they have this disease. A mammogram is an important screening tool that can help doctors find and treat cancer early.

The test uses a special x-ray machine to take pictures of both breasts. The results are recorded on film that a doctor can examine. Mammograms test for breast lumps and changes in breast tissue that may develop into problems over time. They can find small lumps or growths that a doctor or woman can’t feel when doing a breast exam.

Breast lumps or growths can be benign (not cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). If a lump is found, the doctor will order a biopsy – a test where a small amount of tissue is taken from the lump and area around the lump. The tissue is sent to a lab to look for cancer or changes that may mean cancer is likely to develop. Finding breast cancer early means, that a woman has a better chance of surviving the disease. There are also more choices for treatment when breast cancer is found early.

There are two types of mammograms. Screening mammograms are done for women who have no symptoms of breast cancer. Diagnostic mammograms are done when a woman has symptoms of breast cancer or a breast lump. This type takes longer because more pictures of the breast are taken.

Getting a mammogram is easy and does not take much time. First, you stand in front of a special x-ray machine. Then the person who takes the x-rays (always a woman) places your breasts (one at a time) between two plastic plates. The plates press your breast and make it flat. You will feel pressure on your breast for a few seconds. It may cause some discomfort, feeling like a squeeze or pinch. The breasts need to be flat in order to produce the best possible picture. Most often, two pictures are taken of each breast, one from the side and one from above. The whole process takes only a few minutes.

Women over 40 should get a mammogram every 1 to 2 years. Women who have had breast cancer or those with a family history of breast cancer may need to start having mammograms at a younger age or more often. Talk to your doctor about how often you should get a mammogram. Be aware that mammograms don’t take the place of getting breast exams from a doctor and examining your own breasts.

If you find a lump or see changes in your breast, talk to your doctor right away no matter what your age. Your doctor may order a mammogram for you to get a better look at your breast changes.

*Source: Office on Women’s Health in the Department of Health and Human Services
Understanding

1. Why is it wise to get a mammogram? ________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

2. When should a woman get a mammogram? And, how often? __________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

3. What is a biopsy? ________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

4. Who is at greatest risk of developing breast cancer? _________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

5. What are two ways of checking for breast problems? _________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

6. What are two types of lumps that may be found in the breast? How do they differ? ______
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

7. What does the word screen mean in this reading? ____________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

Writing

Choice A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Choice B: Write about your experience with a mammogram or about someone you know who has had one. How was it similar to or different from the information described in the reading?

Choice C: Write about how breast cancer has touched your life or the life of someone you know.