

Adelphi NY Statewide Breast Cancer Hotline & Support Program

800-877-8077

adelphi.edu/breast-cancer



Prepare for Doctors Visits with these Important Questions.



About Mammography and Digital Mammography

- When should I first go for a mammogram?
- What if I have a family history of breast cancer?
- What is a digital mammography?
- How is a digital mammography different from a traditional film mammography?
- Are there advantages to having a digital mammography?
- Will my insurance cover a digital mammography?

Ensuring You Are Getting Your Mammography at a Quality Facility

Choose a facility that answers YES to these 5 questions.

1. Is the facility accredited by the American College of Radiology (ACR)?
2. Does the facility provide mammograms as part of its regular practice?
(Note: The ACR suggests choosing a facility that performs at least 10 mammograms per week.)
3. Is the person who performs the mammogram a registered technologist?
4. Is the radiologist who reads the mammogram specially trained to do so?
5. Is the mammography machine calibrated at least once a year?

Answers to these questions below will help you prepare for the procedure and the steps that will follow.

1. Is there anything I should do to prepare for my mammogram?
Are there any products I should avoid before a mammogram?
2. What will the mammogram show?
3. Who gets the report of my mammogram?
Can it also be sent to other doctors who treat me? May I have a copy of the report sent to me?
4. How long will it take to receive the mammography report?
5. What are the next steps if my mammogram shows a problem?
6. What is the best time to schedule a mammogram?
7. Will the mammogram be covered by my health insurance?

About Breast MRI

Answers to these questions will help you determine if breast MRI is right for you.

1. What is a breast MRI?
2. Am I a good candidate for a breast MRI? Why or why not?

3. Will my insurance cover a breast MRI? Will I need prior approval? What can I do if my insurance won't cover the cost of a breast MRI?

If You Find a Lump In Your Breast

- Can you refer me to an accredited mammography facility for a mammogram?
- Can this lump be aspirated (fluid or cells removed with a needle)?
- What about a biopsy? Why? Why not? What type?
- Can you refer me to a doctor who specializes in breast problems for further tests and/or treatment?
- Would ultrasound be recommended?
- What non-cancerous conditions can cause breast lumps?
- **Helpful Tip:** If a waiting period is advised, consider getting a second opinion from a specialist.

About Breast Biopsy

Answers to these questions will help you understand the procedures involved.

1. What type of biopsy will I have? Why? Will the entire lump be removed or just part of it?
2. Can the lump be aspirated with a needle (the fluid drained or a small number of cells removed)?
3. How reliable is a needle biopsy?
4. How long will the biopsy or aspiration take?
5. Will I be awake during the biopsy or aspiration and can it be done on an outpatient basis?
6. Will scar tissue from the biopsy hinder future mammograms?

Answers to these questions below will help you prepare for the results of the biopsy.

1. If I do have cancer, what other test(s) should I have?
2. Will estrogen or progesterone receptor tests be done on the biopsied tissue you remove? What will these tests tell you? Will other special tests be done on the tissue?
3. How visible will the biopsy scar be?
4. Are there any aftereffects of a biopsy? If so, what are they?
5. After the biopsy, how soon will I know if I have cancer or not?
6. After a biopsy, if cancer is found, how much time can I take to decide what type of treatment to have?
7. Why is a second opinion necessary? Where should I go? What type of doctor should I see?
8. What do I need to take to a second opinion? Original pathology slides/blocks? X-rays? Scans?

When Breast Cancer is Diagnosed

Answers to these questions will help you understand your diagnosis.

1. What did my biopsy show?
2. What kind of breast cancer do I have?
3. What were the results of my estrogen and progesterone tests? What were the results of the other tests?
4. What tests will I have before surgery to see if the cancer has spread?
5. Can I get a copy of the pathology report of the biopsy for my records?
6. How would you classify the stage of my cancer at this point?

Answers to these questions below will help you determine the best type of treatment for you.

1. What are my treatment options? What procedures are you recommending for me and why?
2. What are the potential risks and benefits of these procedures?
3. Will my lymph nodes be removed and tested at the time of my surgery? Am I a candidate for sentinel node biopsy? Why or why not?
4. Ask this question if the tests were not done during the biopsy: Will estrogen and progesterone receptor tests be done on the tissue removed during surgery? What will these tests tell you? Will other special tests be done on the tissue?
5. Am I a candidate for breast-conserving surgery (lumpectomy/partial mastectomy)?
6. If a mastectomy is recommended, am I a candidate for reconstructive surgery?
7. Will I need additional treatment with radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and/or hormonal therapy following my surgery? If so, can you refer me to a medical oncologist or a radiation oncologist? If I do need chemotherapy and/or radiation, will this affect the timing of my reconstruction?
8. Can breast reconstruction be done at the time of the surgery, as well as later? What would you recommend for me?
9. What potential risks and benefits are involved?
10. If I choose not to have reconstruction, how can I find out about breast prostheses? Will my insurance cover this?
11. How long do I have to make a treatment decision?
12. What is a clinical trial? Is there a clinical trial that is enrolling patients with my type of breast cancer? If so, how can I learn more?

13. Could you recommend a breast cancer specialist at another hospital for a second opinion?

Answers to these questions below will help you prepare for the results of your surgery.

1. Where will the surgical scar(s) be? Can the incision be done with cosmetic consideration, re: the location of the scar?
2. What physical and emotional side effects can I expect after the operation?

About Getting a Second Opinion

- There is no one right choice of treatment. Each woman has to make the choice that's best for her at the time. The best choice is based on information.
- Do it! Take your original pathology slides/blocks, x-rays, notes on your health history, and the first doctor's report to a breast specialist.
- If possible, select a doctor who is not associated with the same hospital as your first doctor. What you want is a fresh, objective view. A doctor who works at a teaching hospital may be connected to a medical school and may be more aware of new techniques and information.
- Don't worry about the first doctor being upset/angry that you want a second opinion. Most doctors welcome such consultation. If the two doctors agree – good. If they disagree, go to a third. Remember: it's in your best interest to get as much information as possible during this time.
- If the films are "suspicious," you will need a biopsy to know for sure what is happening in your breast.

Helpful Tips

- Most insurance companies will cover a second opinion. Some require it. Check it out.
- Take your notebook to every doctor's appointment.
- Keep records of all your visits, including names, dates, the questions you asked and the answers you received.
- Remember to take all your reports and films home from the doctor's office. Save yourself the hassle of having to return for them!
- It takes many years for breast cancer to develop. The "extra" time it takes – even several weeks – to get a second opinion won't make a significant difference in the outcome of your case, but it may make a significant difference in the doctor, hospital and treatment you choose.
- You can call the hospitals of your choice and ask for referrals to specialists connected with them.
- While there is no formal listing of breast specialists, there are physicians whose practices are concerned mainly with breast care.
- If you don't have insurance coverage, try to get a second opinion from another physician at a no-cost clinic or from another private doctor who works with a sliding scale fee.

About Breast Reconstruction

Answers to these questions will help you understand reconstructive surgery.

1. What are the types of reconstructive surgery? What type of specialist performs reconstructive surgery?
2. What type is best for me and why (saline implant, gel implant, flap)?
3. Will my insurance cover the cost of these types of reconstructive surgery?
4. What chance is there of rejection and/or infection of any implant?
5. Are there any other risks or side effects to consider?
6. What can be done if the operation is unsuccessful?
7. When is the best time for me to have reconstruction? Same time as the mastectomy? Sometime after surgery? After chemotherapy? Before or after radiation?
8. If I do not choose reconstruction, what prosthesis or breast forms are available?
9. Will my insurance cover the cost of a prosthesis?

Answers to these questions below will help you prepare for your reconstruction and follow-up.

1. How many operations are needed? How long of a hospital stay is necessary for each?
2. How much time is needed for recovery after each? Are there any medications to avoid before surgery?
3. Is there much pain after surgery? For how long?
4. Are special bras needed after surgery? Where do I purchase them?
5. How can I expect the reconstruction to look and feel? How will the reconstructed breast compare in appearance with my healthy breast? Will anything need to be done to the healthy breast?
6. Can you show me pictures of reconstruction? May I speak to patients who have had similar reconstruction?
7. Will I be able to detect a possible recurrence after reconstructive surgery?
8. What techniques are available, i.e. x-rays or sonogram?

After Breast Surgery

Answers to these questions will help you play an active role in your recovery.

1. Are there special exercises I should be doing? What type do you recommend? How long should I continue them?
2. Are there any precautions I should take? For example, if lymph nodes were removed, should I avoid getting shots, shaving, having my blood pressure taken, blood drawn or having cuticles cut during manicures on the affected arm?
3. When will I be able to get back to my normal routine (such as driving, returning to work, etc.)?
4. What problems, specifically, should I report to you?
5. How can I get a copy of the hospital pathology report of my surgery and lymph node analysis for my records?
6. What is lymphedema? What precautions do I take to avoid it?
7. Where can I find a breast cancer support group?

Answers to these questions below will help you prepare for follow-up visits to the doctor.

1. If additional therapy is being considered, can you refer me to a medical oncologist?
2. When the additional therapy is completed, who will be responsible for my follow-up care? How often should I return for an exam? For lab tests or x-rays?
3. What tests will be done at these times?
4. What will the tests tell us?
5. What kind of physician should I see for my long-term follow-up care?

About Radiation Therapy

Answers to these questions will help you understand the reason for radiation therapy.

1. Why is radiation therapy being recommended and what type?
2. Can you explain partial breast radiation? Am I a candidate? Why or why not?
3. Do you think that the size, location, and type of breast cancer I have will respond to radiation therapy?
4. What are the possible short and long-term side effects of radiation therapy?
5. Will there be a problem with skin damage and possible future reconstruction?

Answers to these below questions will help you prepare for the treatment.

1. How long will each treatment take? How long will the whole series last?
2. How soon should treatment begin?
3. Who will be responsible for my radiation treatments? Who will administer them?
4. Where will these treatments be done?
5. Can I come alone or should a friend or relative accompany me?

Answers to these questions below will help you prepare for the treatment's effects on your lifestyle.

1. What side effects should I expect and how long might they last?
2. What are the risks of this treatment? Are there any possible long term side effects?
3. What are the precautions or prohibitions during treatment (skin creams, lotions, underarm shaving, etc.)?
4. Can I continue normal activities during treatment (work, sex, sports, etc.)? After treatment?
5. Will the cost of the treatment be covered by my health insurance?
6. How often are checkups and tests required after treatment is completed?
7. Will other therapies be needed?

About Chemotherapy

Answers to these questions will help you understand the reason for chemotherapy.

1. Why is chemotherapy indicated in my case?
2. Does my medical history affect my choices?
3. What is the significance of lymph node involvement?
4. How many of my lymph nodes are cancerous? How many were removed altogether?
5. If my lymph nodes are not involved, should chemotherapy or hormone therapy still be considered?

Answers to these questions below will help you understand the drugs involved and their effects.

1. What drugs will I be taking?
2. Why have you chosen these particular drugs for me?
3. What are the drugs supposed to do?
4. What are the short and long-term risks involved?
5. If I want to become pregnant, what special steps should I take before starting chemotherapy to preserve my fertility?
6. What are the possible side effects of this type of chemotherapy? Are they permanent?
7. Are there drugs for nausea? Is there a special diet that will help me?
8. Which side effects should I report to the doctor immediately?

Answers to these questions below will help you prepare for your treatment and follow-up.

1. How soon should the chemotherapy be started?
2. How and where will the chemotherapy be given?
3. How long will each treatment take? How long will the whole series last?
4. Can I continue to work, exercise, etc. during these treatments?
5. Will I need to be admitted to the hospital during the course of my chemotherapy?
6. Can I come alone for treatment or should a friend or relative take me?
7. Are there places you can refer me to for help with transportation?
8. **Are there other special precautions I should take before, during or after chemotherapy?**
 - Can chemotherapy affect my dental/oral health and is there anything I should do prior to chemotherapy?
 - Will treatment be covered by my health insurance? If I lose my hair, will the cost of a wig be covered by health insurance?
 - When is the best time to purchase a wig?
 - When treatments are completed, how often will I need to see the oncologist?
 - Will you give me a complete written list of drugs and dosages for my records?
 - Are there special foods that will help me manage side effects?
 - Can you refer me to a nutritionist?

About Hormone Therapy

Answers to these questions will help you understand the reason for hormone treatment.

1. Which hormone treatments are you recommending for me and why?
2. What are the hormone treatments supposed to do?
3. What are the short and long-term side effects of this hormone treatment?
4. What are the risks of hormone treatment?

Answers to these questions below will help you prepare for the treatment itself.

1. How soon should the hormone therapy be started? How long will I be taking the hormone treatments?
2. In what form and how often will the treatment be given?
3. Will I be given the hormone therapy along with other forms of treatment?
4. Is the cost of hormone treatment covered by my health insurance?
5. Is there anything I can do or take to minimize the effects of premature menopause?

About Complementary Wellness and Medicine

Answers to these questions will help you understand complementary medicine.

1. What is complementary medicine?
2. What are some complementary modalities that can be helpful? (i.e. guided imagery, massage therapy, yoga, reiki, meditation, nutrition, acupuncture).
3. Where can I find a certified or licensed practitioner who has an understanding of the special needs of cancer patients?
4. Will my insurance cover complementary wellness treatments?

About Support Groups

Breast cancer support groups provide the opportunity for participants to share feelings, experiences and knowledge, and gain support from others who are in a similar situation. There are different kinds of support groups.

The following questions can help you decide if a support group is for you and which type of group meets your needs.

1. Is a support group for me?
2. Do I want a group that is professionally or peer led?
3. Would I prefer a group that meets for a defined period of time with the same people, or a group that is ongoing with people joining at different times?
4. Do I want to meet weekly, bi-weekly or monthly?
5. Would I prefer a drop-in group or one where regular attendance is encouraged?
6. Do I want a group just for people with breast cancer or a general cancer support group?
7. Will I prefer a group that is specific to the stage of illness (newly diagnosed, post-treatment, advanced cancer) or would I rather be with people at various stages?
8. Do I want a group that is free or am I willing to pay a fee?

Call the Adelphi Breast Cancer Hotline at [800.877.8077](tel:800.877.8077) for help in finding a group in your area that meets your needs, or check the current schedule for support groups offered by our program.