

Radiation

Is the radiation from a mammogram harmful to my health?

Radiation is found all around us – the sun, the ground, and even rocks give off radiation. Understanding your risk from radiation exposure can help you make an informed decision about mammography. A mammogram uses a low dose of radiation. Research shows that the risk of developing and dying from a cancer caused by the radiation from a mammogram is extremely low. It is about the same as the annual risk of dying in a car accident.

Exam	Radiation dose (milliSieverts):
Screening mammograms (4 views)	1.0
Chest x-ray (2 views)	0.06
Lumbar spine (1 view)	0.400
CT head	2.0
CT abdomen	10.0

(Data given by Physics Dept – CancerCare MB 2009)

It is important to weigh the benefits of mammography against the risks. Research shows that for most women ages 50 – 74 the benefits of screening mammography outweigh the risks. This is why CancerCare Manitoba encourages women to have regular mammograms starting at age 50.

What does it mean when people are cautioned not to have too many tests because radiation is cumulative?

Radiation does **not** stay and accumulate in your body with every new exposure. This is a common myth.

So what does cumulative radiation mean?

Cumulative radiation refers to the idea that the more radiation you expose yourself to the higher the chance becomes that cell damage, which may cause cancer, *might* occur.

Think of radiation as moving cars on a busy street. The more often you cross the street, the higher the risk of being hit. However, when you make it safely to the other side of the street you are no longer in danger. Crossing the street can be compared with receiving radiation. The number of cars on the street represents the dose of radiation. The more times you cross the street (have radiation) and the busier the street (the higher the dose of radiation) the more likely you are of getting hit by a car (having cell damage that can lead to cancer).

For more information, or if you have questions, please contact BreastCheck at 1-800-903-9290 or www.BreastCheckmb.ca