Mammogram technology has vastly improved since the diagnostic screening tool became widely used in the 1960s. Today, mammograms save lives by finding cancerous breast tumors when they are still too small for a woman or her doctor to feel.

Mammograms can give women a potentially life-saving head start on treatment. This year, more than 250,000 women will discover they have breast cancer (and some men) according to the American Cancer Society. Thankfully, 84 percent of those women will survive five years or more largely because of early detection from a mammogram.

That’s why Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital and Mercy Philadelphia Hospital now offer women an advanced form of breast imaging not yet available at all hospitals: 3-D mammography.

“With 3-D mammography, doctors can catch more cancers at an earlier stage,” says Karen Kish, MD, a Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital and Mercy Philadelphia Hospital breast surgeon.

Women will not notice much of a difference between 3-D mammograms and standard 2-D mammograms—they feel the same. Where standard mammography only takes images of the breasts from two angles, 3-D mammography produces multiple three-dimensional images taken from several angles.

Better imaging cuts down on the number of women called back for more tests because of a suspicious finding. Although additional testing often reveals everything is okay, the experience makes many women understandably anxious.

The new 3-D mammograms offer a better way to spot and define masses as well as microcalcifications. A stationary X-ray tube looks at multiple layers of the breast and can see through dense breast tissue. Women with dense breast tissue may find 2-D mammography insufficient because dense tissue can overlap on the image and cause shadows, potentially hiding cancerous tumors. Because 3-D mammography allows physicians to see the breast in “slices,” it offers a more comprehensive view.

Three-dimensional mammography is safe. It takes a few seconds longer than a traditional 2-D mammogram, and the amount of radiation exposed to the breast is very minimal. Radiation exposure for patients does not increase when they go from a 2-D standard mammogram to a 3-D mammogram.

“Three-dimensional mammography is a good choice for any woman. But it’s especially beneficial for women with dense breasts,” says Dr. Kish. “Dense breasts make it harder to detect cancer in mammograms, and 3-D mammograms increase accuracy.”

Before you get a mammogram, speak with your doctor about which method is best for you. If cost is a determining factor, speak with your insurer about coverage qualifications, as some insurers may not cover 3-D mammograms. Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital and Mercy Philadelphia Hospital offer convenient walk-in mammography services three days a week. You may also schedule a mammogram by calling 610.237.2525.

Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital breast surgeon Karen Kish, MD, notes 3-D mammography helps doctors with early diagnosis and treatment.

COMMUNITY NEWS
Discovering Breast Cancer Earlier and Easier
Mercy Hospitals’ 3-D Mammography can provide life-saving head start

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