

# Breast Cancer Screenings and Disability in Utah: What You Should Know

## Bear River Health Department

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For nearly 40 years, October has been designated as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Pink shirts, pink ribbons, pink posters and pink bows are put up in areas around town and across the internet. Sports teams wear pink and buildings are decorated with large ribbons. With all the attention, why are we still promoting Breast Cancer Awareness? Unfortunately, breast cancer is still all too common. It is the second-most common cancer after skin cancer in American and Utah women. In fact, 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.

Unfortunately, breast cancer is still the leading cause of female cancer-related death in Utah. Because we aren't catching it as quickly, we aren't treating it as quickly. Our screening rates in Utah are low, but are even lower when we look at our women who live with disabilities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). This was true amongst those with both mobility and cognitive disabilities. What's even more alarming is that when we review research regarding individuals with disabilities and breast cancer, we know that this population is more likely to be diagnosed with cervical or breast cancer. They are often being screened and/or diagnosed at a later age, and their rate of survival decreases. The chances of survival increase the earlier you find the cancer, which is why regular screening is so important. Clinical breast exams and self exams can find changes. However, by the time you can feel a lump the cancer has **progressed much farther** than it would have if it had been found with a regular mammogram.

You've heard the term, but what exactly is a mammogram? A mammogram is an X-ray picture of the breast. Doctors will use this picture to look for early signs of breast cancer. Regular mammograms are currently the best way to find breast cancer early. Also, the radiation used for mammograms is very minimal, so they are quite safe. If you're curious about what it's like to actually get a mammogram, you aren't alone! You can talk to a family member or friend who has had a mammogram and ask them about their experience, or you can check out the frequently asked questions, short videos and resources listed at the bottom of this post.

## Frequently Asked Questions About Mammograms for Women with Disabilities

Below are some answers to common questions about mammograms that can help make the scheduling process and the mammogram itself go as smoothly as possible

### Q: At what age should I get my first mammogram?

A: If you are between the ages of 40 to 49, talk to your doctor about when and how often you should have a screening mammogram. If you are between the ages of 50 to 74, be sure to have a screening mammogram every two years.

### Q: What are some questions to ask the mammography center when I call for an appointment?

A: Ask questions that will help you know how to prepare and what to expect, such as:

- How do I prepare if I use a wheelchair or a scooter?
- Can the machine be adjusted so I can remain seated?
- How long is the appointment and can I have more time if I need it?

### Q: What information do I need give the mammography center?

A: Let the center know if you cannot

- Sit upright with or without assistance.
- Lift and move your arms.
- Transfer from your chair/scooter.
- Undress/dress without assistance.

### Q: Can I bring a support person to my appointment?

A: This will depend on the facility and any protocols in place, so be sure to ask this question when you call for your appointment

**Q: What if I cannot stand up for the mammogram?**

A: When you call for your appointment, talk to the center and let them know that you will need assistance. The facility or your provider may recommend a different type of test that will not require you to stand.

**Q: How should I dress for my appointment?**

A: Consider wearing a blouse that opens in the front and a bra that you can remove easily. You will need to be able to undress from the waist up so a dress is not recommended.

**Q: Do I need an order from a healthcare provider?**

A: You do not need an order or prescription for a screening mammogram. If further testing is required, you may need an order from a provider.

**Q: What if I do not have insurance?**

A: The Utah Cancer Control Program (UCCP) is a federally funded program that acts as a payer to cover the cost of breast and cervical cancer screenings and some diagnostic testing. Individuals with or without insurance can qualify for the program based on income and household size (based on 250% of the federal poverty level). To enroll, call 1-800-717-1811 and be prepared to answer questions about your breast and cervical history as well as income, family size, and some other general registration questions. This process takes about 15 minutes to complete. The tests can then be done through your primary care provider if they are contracted with the program. If your provider is not contracted with UCCP, you can still receive a mammogram through a contracted facility. For questions regarding the Utah Cancer Control Program, call **1-800-717-1811**.

In short, mammograms can save lives. Breast cancer is still very prevalent in the United States and in Utah. Please make getting screened a priority in your life. There are programs and resources available to help prepare you for your appointment and even cover the cost. For more information, visit [Utah Cancer Control Program](#)

## Resources

[Your First Mammogram: What to Expect](#) (1 minute video, MD Anderson Cancer Care Center)

[Getting a Mammogram - What to Expect](#) (5 minute video, Kettering Health)

[It's Your Life. No one can protect it better than you. Know the facts about breast cancer screening.](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

[Size of Tumors Found By Mammography and Breast Self-Exam](#) (Susan G. Komen)

[Utah Cancer Control Program](#) (Utah Department of Health). Includes a list of screening clinics for breast and cervical cancers.