

Screening Breast Ultrasound for the Average Risk Population

Key messages

- Based on current evidence, breast ultrasound in addition to mammography is not recommended for screening of average risk women 50 to 74 years of age.
- Cancer Care Ontario will continue to monitor the evidence on screening breast ultrasound. As new evidence emerges, this position statement may be updated.

Position statement from the Ontario Breast Screening Program

Ultrasound has traditionally been used as an assessment tool for evaluating mammographic abnormalities or in the management of women with symptoms related to the breast. While the use of ultrasound is well-established as a screening test in women at high risk for breast cancer who cannot undergo magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), the role of screening breast ultrasound in addition to mammography in women who are not at high risk is somewhat controversial and often confusing to patients.

Screening tests are performed on healthy, asymptomatic people; therefore, scientific evidence on the effectiveness of the test should be established prior to implementation.

Gartlehner et al. performed a systematic review to assess the comparative benefits and harms of mammography alone and mammography with adjunct breast ultrasound in breast cancer screening. Multiple electronic databases, as well as the Cochrane Breast Cancer Group's Specialised Register, were searched. The authors concluded that there was no methodologically sound scientific evidence to justify the routine use of ultrasound as an adjunct screening test in women at average risk for breast cancer.

The Ontario Breast Screening Program's recommendation on screening breast ultrasound for the average risk population

Breast ultrasound in addition to mammography is not recommended for screening of average risk women 50 to 74 years of age. Cancer Care Ontario will continue to monitor the evidence on breast screening ultrasound. As new evidence emerges, this position statement may be updated.

The Ontario Breast Screening Program's recommendations for breast cancer screening

The Ontario Breast Screening Program recommends that women 50 to 74 years of age be screened every two years with mammography.

The Ontario Breast Screening Program also recommends that women who have been determined to be at high risk for breast cancer and are 30 to 69 years of age be screened annually with mammography and breast MRI.

To find out more about the Ontario Breast Screening Program, please visit
www.cancercare.on.ca/screenforlife.

Reference:

Adjunct ultrasonography for breast cancer screening in women at average risk: a systematic review. Gartlehner G, Thaler KJ, Chapman A, Kaminski A, Berzaczy D, Van Noord MG, Helbich TH. *Int J Evid Based Healthc*. 2013 Jun;11(2):87–93.

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 1-855-460-2647  TTY (416) 217-1815  publicaffairs@cancercare.on.ca

