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Question:

Do I need a breast MRI?

Answer:

A breast MRI is often helpful when cancer exists and physicians need more information to see the size or extent of the tumor before treatment. MRI can also help with women who have dense breasts. Women who are at high risk with either a family history of breast cancer and/or the breast cancer gene may use MRI as a routine screening test. Breast MRI can also be used to see if silicone implants are leaking.

How do I know if I am at high risk for breast cancer?

Genetic counseling is the best way to determine this because there are many factors that can alter the risk for breast cancer. Briefly, if your mother, daughter or any of your sisters have breast cancer before menopause or if you are known to carry the breast cancer gene (BRCA-1,2), you are considered high risk for breast cancer.

If I get a breast MRI, do I still need a mammogram?

Yes, absolutely. Breast MRI is an excellent test to look for breast cancer, but it is not perfect. Calcifications present in some forms of breast cancer are not visible with breast MRI. The best results come from combining information from a mammogram and breast MRI. In many cases, ultrasound of the breast may be useful as well.

What is breast MRI like?

Breast MRI is different than a mammogram. The images are obtained with an MRI that uses a very large magnet. You will lie on your stomach over a padded area with your breasts below the device designed to make images specifically of the breasts. This should be comfortable. An IV and contrast injection are used for cases of suspected cancer. While inside the MRI, you will hear loud banging noises. Earplugs should be provided. The exam lasts about 20-30 minutes. You should do your best to remain still during the exam.