

Mammogram alert

A second look can save your life

The accuracy of mammogram readings improves dramatically when your film is read by two different doctors

News reports that doctors are missing breast cancer tumors on mammograms have left many women exasperated. But there's a way to increase your chances of getting an accurate screening: Ask your mammogram facility to have two radiologists read your film.

A recent study found that breast cancer detection rates increased by almost 10 percent when mammograms were double read. "Double reading leads to earlier-stage detection, which equals better chances of survival," says lead study author Susan C. Harvey, M.D., assistant professor of radiology at the University of Vermont College of Medicine, in Burlington.

But because most mammogram centers don't have enough radiologists on staff to routinely offer double readings, it's up to you to press for one. If they say they can't do it, try to find a center that will. Also know that most health plans don't reimburse for the extra reading, so you may have to pay an additional \$30 to \$50 out of your own pocket.

Another effective alternative that's becoming more widely available is computer-aided detection (CAD), in which a computer does the additional reading from a digitized version of the X-ray film. A recent study found that

radiologists can increase their cancer detection rates 20 percent when interpreting mammograms with the help of CAD. So far, only three companies have gained FDA approval for their CAD devices. The first, R2 Technology, currently has machines in about 450 facilities. To find one, go to www.r2tech.com.

No matter where or how you get your mammograms, the most important thing is to keep getting screened. "While there has been a lot of controversy," says Harvey, "all the major institutions, including the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society and the American College of Radiology, still recommend yearly mammograms."

—Rachel Rabkin

Check out our comprehensive breast cancer report:
www.lhj.com/breastcancer

body briefs

Ready relief

The FDA recently approved a new drug, Zelnorm, for women with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). While Zelnorm doesn't cure IBS or treat diarrhea-prominent IBS (like the drug Lotronex), it has been shown to reduce constipation, abdominal pain and bloating.

Money maker

Caring for an aged or ailing relative? To ease the financial burden, consider joining The Caregivers Marketplace for rebates or discounts on items like bathing supplies and incontinence products. To enroll, call 866-327-8340 or visit www.caregiversmarketplace.com.

Web warning

A new study from Colorado State University found that most health-related Web sites are either selling products or making claims that aren't supported by research. For reliable health information on the Web, stick to sites run by the government, universities or medical associations.

—Dominique Andrews

