

Palpable Breast Masses

Palpable breast masses are breast lumps that can be felt by touch. Most breast lumps (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org/breastlumps>) are benign (not cancerous). However, breast lumps are the most common symptom associated with breast cancer and require imaging tests to determine if they are benign or malignant.

For women aged 30 and older with a new breast lump, diagnostic mammography and diagnostic digital breast tomosynthesis (or “3-D mammogram”) are usually appropriate as a first test. Ultrasound (US) breast (sonogram) may also be appropriate as a first test. These tests are complementary and may be performed together.

If initial mammography findings are normal, US breast may be appropriate for further evaluation. If initial mammography findings are suspicious or highly suggestive of malignancy, US breast is usually appropriate for additional evaluation.

For female patients younger than 30 with a breast lump, US breast is usually appropriate as first test. If US findings are suspicious, mammography and ultrasound-guided needle biopsy are usually appropriate.

Individuals with a new breast lump with normal findings on imaging tests should follow up with their doctor because some cancers may have a normal appearance on imaging. A new breast lump might need a biopsy even when the mammogram or ultrasound is normal.

Sometimes, US or mammography will show a finding that is characterized as “probably benign” or very unlikely to be cancer (BI-RADS 3). In this case, no other imaging is needed right away, but a follow-up examination will be recommended to make sure that the finding does not grow or change.

—By Rachael Newman and Nina S. Vincoff, MD. This information originally appeared in the *Journal of the American College of Radiology*.

Disclaimer

This information is copied from the RadiologyInfo Web site (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org>) which is dedicated to providing the highest quality information. To ensure that, each section is reviewed by a physician with expertise in the area presented. All information contained in the Web site is further reviewed by an ACR (American College of Radiology) - RSNA (Radiological Society of North America) committee, comprising physicians with expertise in several radiologic areas.

However, it is not possible to assure that this Web site contains complete, up-to-date information on any particular subject. Therefore, ACR and RSNA make no representations or warranties about the suitability of this information for use for any particular purpose. All information is provided “as is” without express or implied warranty.

Please visit the RadiologyInfo Web site at <http://www.radiologyinfo.org> to view or download the latest information.

Note: Images may be shown for illustrative purposes. Do not attempt to draw conclusions or make diagnoses by comparing these images to other medical images, particularly your own. Only qualified physicians should interpret images; the radiologist is the physician expert trained in medical imaging.

Copyright

This material is copyrighted by either the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA), 820 Jorie Boulevard, Oak Brook, IL 60523-2251 or the American College of Radiology (ACR), 1891 Preston White Drive, Reston, VA 20191-4397. Commercial reproduction or multiple distribution by any traditional or electronically based reproduction/publication method is prohibited.

Copyright © 2026 Radiological Society of North America, Inc.

