Routine Chest Radiography

Getting a chest x-ray before going into the hospital for an operation or for something routine is not needed unless a patient has heart or lung disease or symptoms of a heart or lung condition. The x-ray does not add information that would change treatment after getting information about the patient's medical history and symptoms and performing the physical examination. Chest x-rays should not be used routinely for the evaluation of patients with high blood pressure unless some type of heart disease is suspected. Chest x-rays are not recommended for routine physical examinations or for lung cancer screening.

For patients older than 70 years, patients with heart or lung disease or who have had heart or lung disease in the past, or if the medical history is not available, having a chest x-ray before an operation or when admitted to the hospital may be appropriate. Also, if a patient is undergoing a high-risk operation, such as emergency surgery, it may be appropriate to have a chest x-ray. However, having a chest x-ray before an operation does not mean that after the operation, during the recovery process, the patient will not have issues with lung function.

Chest x-rays expose patients to radiation. They also can show things that are not associated with the reason for the x-ray, called incidental findings. Sometimes these findings can lead to more tests or treatments that are not really needed.

For more information, see the Chest X-ray [https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/chestrad] page.

— By Casey Quinlan. This information originally appeared in the Journal of the American College of Radiology.

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