

# Like clockwork

from Dr. Laura Corio, M.D.

Women's Health Issues

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## Setting the Record Straight: Mammograms

The mammogram recommendations recently released by the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force have left many of my patients feeling confused about what to do. The task force called for women to begin getting mammograms at age 50 and repeat the test every two years. This is in direct contradiction to the well established American Cancer Society's recommendations for most women to begin getting mammograms at age 40 and starting at age 35 for women at high risk of breast cancer. The task force went on to say that all women should skip self breast exams because they aren't effective and because they also raise false alarms. They also expressed doubt about the mammography benefits for women over the age of 74 though they stopped short of recommending that older women skip having them.

The 16 member panel found that yearly mammograms unquestionably reduced the risk of dying from breast cancer 15% in women under 50. But when weighed against the risks of screening they felt the relative benefit was too small to recommend early screening. For younger women, the panel says, mammography can trigger unnecessary biopsies, painful treatment and mental anguish. In addition, screening can find cancers that are so small that they may never kill a woman or cause her any harm or discomfort.

Although I don't think the panel was deliberately trying to cause controversy, they have stirred a pot that, in my opinion, didn't need stirring. The current guidelines are working. They are saving lives. I see this in my own practice. A good percentage of my patients with breast cancer were diagnosed before the age of fifty; without screening their cancer would have gone undetected. Delayed screening often leads to diagnosis in the later stages of cancer when the disease is more difficult to treat and chance of survival is diminished. Without early screening, I can honestly say that some of my patients probably wouldn't be here.

So I want to go on record as saying I strongly disagree with the panel's assessment and their subsequent recommendations. I unequivocally recommend that all my patients stick with the old guidelines. While the panel is dealing in statistics, I'm dealing with real lives. Every patient is a mother, a daughter, a wife. If screening saves even one woman a year, I think it is well worth the inconveniences it may otherwise cause.

And please, please continue with your self breast exams. I have always believed that the more aware you are of yourself, the more likely you are to take care of yourself. If you detect any abnormalities, make an appointment immediately. Together, we will judge whether or not you've got something to worry about. If it's a false positive, so be it. Wouldn't you agree it is better to be safe than sorry?

For now, most other government and medical sources are speaking out against the new guidelines. My concern is that the cat is now out of the bag and we have opened the door for insurance companies to back off from covering important, potentially lifesaving services for women. If this happens it will erode the progress we have made in the prevention and treatment of breast cancer which still remains the second leading cause of death of women in this country.



### Do you have a question?

If you're still confused about when to have a mammogram and which guidelines to follow, make an appointment and give me a call to discuss. This is an important issue for every woman.



#### Dr. Corio's Resources

Breast Cancer Recommendations on the Web:

<http://www.cancer.org>

<http://ww5.komen.org>

<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/3rduspstf/breastCancer/brcanrr.htm>

## PEARLS

**The Question:** I am pregnant and noticed that my breasts are lumpier. Should I have a mammogram?

**The Research:** A few, small studies have found that mammography poses little to no harm to the fetus during pregnancy if a lead shield is placed on the belly to block any possible radiation. However, the test seems less reliable for pregnant women. In three different studies, the percentage of breast cancers in pregnant women that mammography detected was between 62% and 78%. This is significantly lower than the average 85% detection rate in non-pregnant women.

**Dr. Corio Says:** Your breasts go through some amazing changes during pregnancy. They fill with fluid and can enlarge up to twice their normal size. And yes, they can lumpier and bumpier too. The good news is that studies show up to 80% of lumps discovered during pregnancy are benign. This is reassuring but that should not prevent you from bringing any unusual breast changes to my attention immediately. Do not wait until after you have delivered to mention these things to me! I will check to make sure everything is OK and if we suspect a problem, we will usually consider a sonogram first before other tests.

**The Question:** I have breast implants. Will a mammogram still read me accurately?

**The Research:** Studies show that breast implants can obscure mammography films and make them harder to read. Still, that doesn't mean you should stop having mammograms if you have implants. Statistics also show that there is a slight risk that your breast implants may rupture during a mammogram. But I believe that the benefits of mammography in the early detection of breast cancer outweigh this risk.

**Dr. Corio Says:** If you have breast implants, continue to have mammograms as scheduled; I will probably prescribe a sonogram for you too. If you've had implants as part of breast reconstruction following breast cancer surgery, we may want to get a mammogram of the reconstructed breast as a baseline. Be sure to inform the mammography facility about your breast implants when scheduling a mammogram and ask for a technician and radiologist who are experienced in x-raying patients with breast implants. Steps can be taken to make sure that as much breast tissue as possible can be seen on the mammogram. The sonogram is an extra precaution.

Sources: breastcancer.org, cancer.org, mayoclinic.com

Questions or comments? Contact us at [www.obgyn-ny.com](http://www.obgyn-ny.com), (646) 422.0730, 113 East 64th Street, NY, NY, 10021

## Doctor & Office Hours

### Doctor's Hours

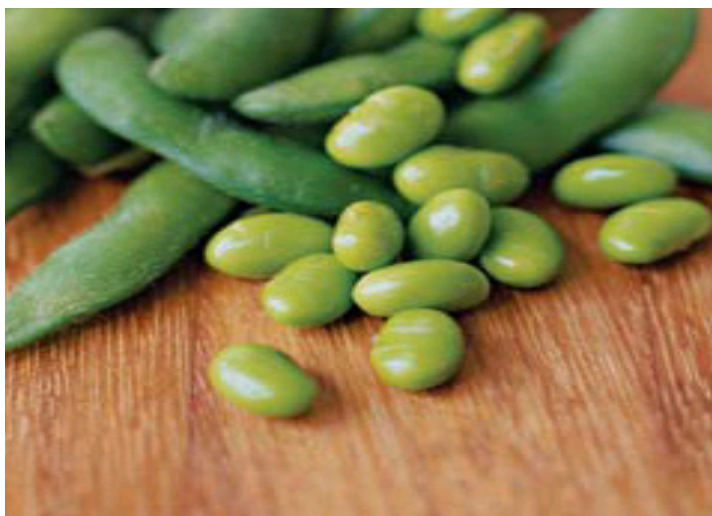
Monday	12:00 PM-6:00 PM
Tuesday	9:00 AM-3:00 PM
Wednesday	9:30 AM-2:30 PM
Thursday	8:00 AM-2:00 PM

### Office Hours

Monday	10:00 AM-5:00 PM
Tuesday – Friday	9:00 AM-4:00 PM

Make an Appointment

Call 646-422-0730 during our normal office hours.



## News Flash

If you've been avoiding soy because of concerns it increases your breast cancer risk, it could be time to celebrate with an extra-tall soy latte. A study published in Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) found Chinese women with breast cancer who ate high amounts of soy, significantly lowered their chance of death and cancer reoccurrence. Of the 5,042 breast cancer survivors studied, patients in the group who consumed the most soy over the four year period after their diagnosis had a 29 percent lower risk of death, and a 32 percent lower risk of breast cancer recurrence compared to patients with the lowest intake of soy protein. Benefits seemed to top out at about 11 grams of soy protein per day, the equivalent of about half a cup of tofu or edamame beans. Researchers caution: American diets vary significantly from Asian diets so it is too early to tell whether or not these results fully apply to Western women.