

MYTH: Sometimes women with disabilities think that because they have a disability or chronic condition they won't get breast cancer.

FACT: Breast cancer is an equal opportunity disease. One in eight women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime.

Women with Disabilities and Breast Cancer: Know Your Rights

Women with Disabilities—

- Receive fewer breast exams and mammograms than non-disabled women.
- Are less likely to receive breast-conserving surgery, more likely to have a mastectomy.
- Have the same incidence of breast cancer as women without disabilities, but are nearly one-third more likely to die from it.

Federal, state, and local laws mandate equal access to health care for people with disabilities.

A clinic, hospital or physician refusing to care for you because you have a disability may be illegal discrimination.

GET THE CARE YOU NEED

Mammograms:

If you are 40 years of age or older, ask your healthcare provider for a referral for a screening mammography, an X-ray of the breast, which you should have every year or two thereafter. If you have special risk factors (e.g., family or personal history, genetic mutations, dense breast tissue), talk to your doctor, no matter your age.

In general, health care providers must:

- Remove architectural barriers
- Provide accessible medical equipment
- Provide communication aids (e.g., sign language interpreters, Braille materials)
- Assist you with transferring and dressing if you need it
- Help position you for your exam, including, e.g., offering Velcro straps as aids

They cannot:

- Tell you that you'll take too much time to treat because you have a disability
- Call in the janitor or other untrained staff to help position you
- Say they cannot help position or transfer you because it would be a legal liability (e.g., their staff doesn't know how to use positioning aids or equipment)
- Turn you away

Clinical Breast Exams:

A check-up by a health professional feeling for breast changes; to be done every 3 years for women in their 20s and 30s, and every year for women 40 and over.

Breast Self Exam:

Check your breasts regularly for lumps or other changes (size, shape). If you can't do it yourself, ask for help—a significant other, family member or your consumer-directed personal assistant.

When Scheduling Your Mammogram

- Inform the site that you have a disability and tell them what it is.
- **Let them know if you use a mobility aid, and specify the type—i.e., manual or motorized wheelchair, scooter, walker, braces.**
- If you use a wheelchair—
 - **Ask if the mammography machine can be adjusted so that you can remain seated in your wheelchair.**
 - Know if the armrests and leg rests can be removed—this will help with positioning.
 - Tell them if you use a back support as part of your wheelchair; this could interfere with the picture of your breasts, so the technologist may need to take additional views.
- Let them know if you can sit upright and transfer from your wheelchair.
- Let them know if you can dress/undress with or without assistance.
- If you don't use a wheelchair but can't stand for the whole exam, ask if they will make a chair available for you.
- Ask if they have an accessible bathroom and dressing room; if not, what accommodations can they make.
- **Let them know if you can stand and for how long, if you can raise one or both arms with or without assistance, or if you have spasticity.**
- It is your right to have your home care worker assist facility staff with transferring if you wish. It is also your right to have your home care worker present during the exam to help with your positioning.

For more information, visit us at www.icsny.org, email us at info@icsny.org or call 212 420 6661.

WAITING TIME AND TRANSPORTATION

- There may be some waiting time before your exam; this is common in many facilities, with all patients. Be patient.
- If you use Access-A-Ride, be sure to schedule your drop off and pick up with some extra time on both ends of your visit.

ON THE DAY OF YOUR APPOINTMENT

- Do not wear deodorant or body powder as this may result in a false positive test.
- Wear loose fitting clothing and a bra that removes easily.
- Bring something to keep you occupied!

If you are refused care, treated in a way that is inappropriate, or if the facility is inaccessible, you can take action. For more information about your legal rights, contact New York Lawyers for the Public Interest at 212-224-4664 or www.nylpi.org/factsheets.

Independence
care system

Independence Care System's Breast Cancer Screening Project for Women with Physical Disabilities is funded by the Greater NYC Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure®