

What are breast calcifications?

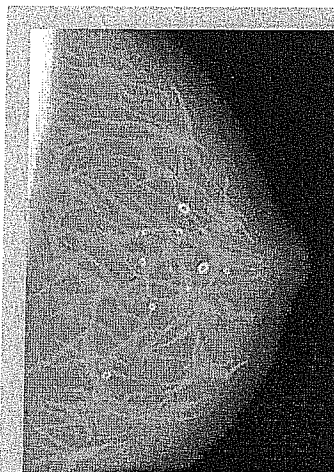
Breast calcifications are tiny calcium deposits that form in the breast as a woman ages. They are common and can result from a number of different things such as trauma to the breast and inflammation. There is no known relationship between the amount of calcium in a woman's diet and breast calcifications.

Calcifications are too small to be felt. They can be seen on a mammogram where they appear as little white spots. Most of the time calcifications are harmless. However, sometimes they can be a sign of breast cancer, so they must be looked at carefully.

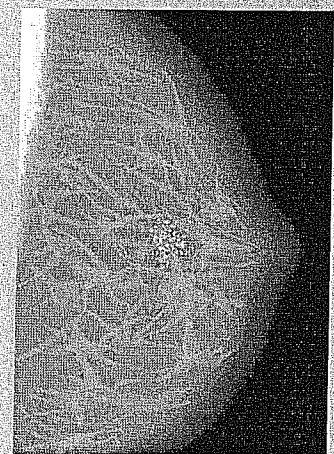
Types of calcifications

There are two main types of calcifications, macro and micro.

- Macrocalcifications are almost always benign (not cancer). They appear large and round on the mammogram films and require no further follow-up.
- Microcalcifications are smaller and more numerous than the larger macrocalcifications. They are usually benign, but can sometimes be a sign of cancer. The radiologist will look at the size, shape and pattern of the microcalcifications to see if they are "suspicious." More mammograms and a biopsy may be necessary. "Suspicious" microcalcifications turn out to be cancer about 20 to 25 percent of the time.



Benign macrocalcifications are larger and randomly spread throughout the breast. No follow-up care is usually needed.



Microcalcifications are small, appear clustered and have irregular shapes. These may be a sign of cancer. Follow-up with more mammograms and perhaps a biopsy are needed.



Indeterminate microcalcifications

Sometimes it is hard to tell if microcalcifications are cancer or not. These microcalcifications are called “indeterminate.” When this happens the radiologist may take more X-rays to help decide if the microcalcifications are benign, probably benign, suspicious or malignant. If they are “probably benign,” then there is a 98 percent chance that they are not cancer. However, if they are “suspicious,” more follow-up is needed.

Questions to ask your radiologist

- Has my mammogram changed since my last one?
- What changes do you see?
- What do those changes mean?
- If you suggest I come back for a follow-up mammogram, what are the benefits and risks of waiting?
- If you suggest I have a biopsy, what are the benefits and risks of having it now?

Questions to ask your surgeon if a biopsy is needed

- What kind of biopsy will I have?
- Where will the biopsy be done?
- What type of anesthesia will be used?
- How should I expect to feel when the biopsy is over?
- When will I be able to return to my normal activities?
- After the biopsy, how soon will I know the results?
- If cancer is found, who will tell me the results and discuss my treatment options?

Resources

Book

Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book, 4th ed., by Susan M. Love with Karen Lindsey. 2005 (Addison-Wesley). See Chapter 7.

Organizations

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation
1-800 I'M AWARE
www.komen.org

American Cancer Society
1.800.227.2345
www.cancer.org

National Cancer Institute
1.800.4CANCER
www.cancer.gov

Related fact sheets in this series:

- mammography
- biopsy
- what is breast cancer?

The above list of resources is only a suggested resource and is not a complete listing of breast health and breast cancer materials or information. The information contained herein is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. The Komen Foundation does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referenced herein.