

ALERT: Mammograms Leading to Widespread Overdiagnosis - Unnecessary Treatment -- In Older Women, NCI Study Reveals

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An alarming new study reveals that mammograms in older women are doing more harm than good. Not only did mammography not increase survival, but the older the woman, the more likely she will suffer overdiagnosis and unnecessary surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. Among women aged 85 and older, an estimated 54% of breast cancer was potentially overdiagnosed as a result of breast 'preventive' breast screenings.

The new study titled, "[Estimating Breast Cancer Overdiagnosis After Screening Mammography Among Older Women in the United States](#) ^[3]," published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, indicates that the overdiagnosis and overtreatment of breast cancer in older women is far more widespread than commonly believed. Given that women undergoing annual or biannual screenings are not being properly informed of the risks, and in some cases only being told the purported benefits, it is pertinent that this information be shared far and wide.

Funded by the [National Cancer Institute](#) ^[4], and therefore a high gravitas study, the retrospective cohort of 54,635 women 70 years and older compared the cumulative incidence of breast cancer in those who had been recently screened, with those who did not.

The study looked at both breast cancer diagnoses and breast cancer related mortality for up to 15 years of follow-up. What makes this study exceptional is that the researchers included breast cancer death as an end point, and not just diagnoses, which makes it possible to determine whether mammography is actually having a net benefit on extending the lives of those who consent to undergo them.

Sadly, the overdiagnosis of breast cancer is exceedingly common. Breast cancer overdiagnosis is defined as screen-detected breast cancer that would not have caused symptoms or signs in the remaining lifetime. In many cases, those diagnosed with "breast cancer" actually have benign abnormalities, such as [ductal carcinoma in situ](#) ^[5] (also known oxymoronically as "stage zero" breast cancer), which in the vast majority of cases will not cause morbidity or mortality if left undiagnosed and untreated.

By treating DCIS as equivalent to active cancer, and implementing surgery, radiation and chemotherapy, many of these overdiagnosed and overtreated women will have their lives cut short, despite being told that their treatments "saved their lives." The psychosocial impacts of overdiagnosis and overtreatment, alone, have the potential to cause grave health impacts which may greatly reduce both the quality and the length of the lives of those affected. ^[6]

Despite a National Cancer Institute commissioned expert panel concluding in 2013 that DCIS should no longer be referred to as "cancer," mammography campaigns continue to generate about 50,000 DCIS diagnoses in the U.S. alone, annually; most of which are treated aggressively. In tandem, ever since the pharmaceutical industry launched mass mammography campaigns in [1985](#) ^[7], they continue to be marketed to the public as the most effective way to "prevent breast cancer," despite a [growing body of evidence to the contrary.](#) ^[8]

The study found the following results, stratified by age:

- Among women aged 70 to 74 years, an estimated **31% of breast cancer among screened women were potentially overdiagnosed.**
- Among women aged 75 to 84 years, an estimated **47% of breast cancer among screened women were potentially overdiagnosed.**

- Among women aged 85 and older, an estimated **54% of breast cancer among screened women were potentially overdiagnosed.**
- **There were no significant reductions in breast cancer–specific death associated with screening.**

As can be seen above, overdiagnosis of breast cancer in older women is happening at an alarming rate, and constitutes a significant public health threat which should be taken as seriously as the harms of polypharmacy in elderly populations.

This latest finding speaks to how important it is for women of all ages to understand the problem of overdiagnosis, overtreatment, and having access to information not colored by the medical and pharmaceutical industries who often have agendas that bias information towards interventions that carry more risks than benefits.

In May, for instance, [we reported](#) ^[9] on the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF)'s new draft recommendations urging all women to undergo x-ray mammography breast screenings every other year, **starting at 40 instead of 50**, as previous guidelines from 2016 recommended.

Our opinion is that the USPSTF's latest draft guidelines are coming from a very weak and highly contested evidence-base, and are biased against the fundamental medical ethical principle of "do no harm" because USPSTF did not sufficiently account for the well-known yet underreported harms associated with the diagnostic process itself (all mammography uses carcinogenic gamma radiation), overdiagnosis and overtreatment.

Indeed, GreenMedinfo.com has been reporting on these three contravening factors for the past 15 years with some regularity. You can consult the following sections on our database to learn more:

- [Mammography Harms](#) ^[10]
- [Overdiagnosis Harms](#) ^[11]
- [Overtreatment Harms](#) ^[12]

You can also consult the international best-selling book "[REGENERATE: Unlocking Your Body's Radical Resilience with the New Biology](#) ^[13]," the most lengthy chapter of which concerns cancer: Chapter 4: Beyond Gene Mutation, Cancer's Origin, Prevention and Treatment, Livesaving Patient Empowerment and Resilience Strategies. You can [download a free chapter here](#) ^[14].

Additional free reading on the topic of Mammography, Overdiagnosis and Overtreatment include:

- ['Hidden Dangers' of Mammograms Every Woman Should Know About](#) ^[6]
- [Covering Up The Causes of Breast Cancer Since 1985: AstraZeneca's BCAM](#) ^[15]
- [30 Years of Breast Screening: 1.3 Million Wrongly Treated](#) ^[16]
- [How X-Ray Mammography Is Accelerating The Epidemic of Cancer](#) ^[17]
- [Millions Fall Prey To This Deadly Breast Cancer Myth](#) ^[5]
- [Why Mammography Is Unscientific And Harmful](#) ^[18]
- [The Dark Side of Breast Cancer Awareness Month - Part II](#) ^[19]
- [Thermography is Key for Early Detection of Breast Cancer](#) ^[20]

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[27]

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