

What are breast calcifications?

- Calcifications are small calcium deposits in the breast tissue that can be seen only on a mammogram.
- These calcium deposits are tiny and cannot be felt by you or your doctor during a breast exam.

What causes breast calcifications?

- Calcium deposits can occur in the breast as a result of swelling, injury, aging blood vessels, a duct plugged with milk years before, or cancer.
- Taking calcium pills and drinking milk does not cause them.

There are two types of calcifications:

1. **Microcalcifications** –These calcium deposits appear as very fine white specs on a mammogram. A radiologist carefully studies the shape and size of the calcium deposits to determine if they require further study. Most often, microcalcifications have nothing to do with cancer. However, in about 30% of cases they can be related to an **early** breast cancer.
2. **Coarse (or Punctate) Calcifications** –On mammogram, these calcium deposits appear as a single white dot that are larger in appearance than microcalcifications. They are usually benign (not cancer).

What if calcifications are seen on a mammogram?

Follow-up depends on the appearance of the calcium deposits.

If **Microcalcifications** are seen your doctor may advise:

- Magnification views, or a “close-up” mammogram of the area of concern
- Follow-up mammogram in 3-6 months
- Core biopsy of the calcifications with stereotactic (mammographic) guidance
- Surgical biopsy done with needle localization

Coarse calcifications are followed by mammogram.

- The radiologist will compare any recent mammogram films to previous films to make sure that no changes in the calcifications have occurred.
- Biopsy of these coarse calcium deposits is not required.

This information is of a general nature and may vary according to your special circumstances. If you have specific questions, please contact your physician or appropriate health care professional.

References:

1. Kneece, J. (2003). *Finding a lump in your breast. Where to go...what to do.* (2nd ed.). Columbia: EduCare Inc.
2. Love, S. (2000). *Dr. Susan Love's breast book* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Perseus.

