

# Breast Calcifications

## Definitions:

**Benign** - not a cancer; does not harm the body

**Biopsy** - A procedure in which a tissue sample is removed from the body for examination under a microscope to find out if cancer or other abnormal cells are present

**Malignant** - a cancer; does harm to the body

**Mammogram** - An x-ray of the breast

## What is a “calcification”?

Calcifications are small calcium deposits in the breast that can only be seen by mammography. They are divided into two types: *macrocalcifications* and *microcalcifications*.

**Macrocalcifications** are coarse (bigger) calcium deposits that form in the breast when there are changes such as:

- Aging blood vessels
- Breast injuries or trauma to the breast
- Inflammation (redness / swelling)

These deposits are usually benign (non-cancerous) and do not require a biopsy.

**Microcalcifications** are very small deposits of calcium in the breast. They have different shapes and are found in benign and malignant conditions. When a group of microcalcifications are seen in one area, they are called a *cluster*.

## **How are calcifications found?**

Both types of calcifications are too small to be felt. They can only be seen on a mammogram.

## **What happens if I have calcifications?**

Calcifications found on a mammogram can signal a benign or a malignant condition. They are not always cancerous. In some cases they might not even need to be biopsied. Your doctor or radiologist may recommend another mammogram in 3 to 6 months. If the calcifications are more suspicious, a biopsy might be recommended.

There are several methods of sampling the calcifications. Because calcifications are too small to be felt, the biopsy procedure will include locating the calcifications with a mammogram prior to the procedure. Once located the calcifications are biopsied with a procedure called a “core biopsy” or a “wire localization biopsy”.

Your doctor or radiologist will decide which of these procedures is best for you if a biopsy is necessary. Information regarding these procedures is available on separate Procedure Information Sheets and can be found at the UM Cancer Center website: [www.mcancer.org](http://www.mcancer.org). The procedure information may also be requested at the Patient Education Resource Center on level B2 of the Cancer Center.

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