False-positive mammogram readings trigger heightened stress and anxiety.

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Early detection is key in the treatment of cancer, thus it is recommended that women begin having yearly mammograms starting at age 40. It is important to know, however, that a mammography is not a formal diagnosis. There may be false-positives, in which an abnormal mammogram does not, in fact, reflect any cancer. Although physiologically, this is good news, a study published in the *British Journal of Surgery* shows that many women who receive a false-positive reading experience higher levels of anxiety and lower quality of life. There are several reasons for this response; false-positives require further evaluations and tests, often more than patients who receive actual positive diagnoses, since physicians want to be absolutely sure there is no problem. Furthermore, patients already living with a moderate level of anxiety find their worries augmented by this new fear that they may have developed cancer. This study indicates that while mammograms are extremely important detecting cancer early, it is important to keep patients informed that an abnormal reading is not a direct indication of cancer; it is merely a way to alert physicians to potentially unusual results, which require follow-up procedures.

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