



TODAY, IN 1976

NASA publicly unveiled the space shuttle Enterprise at ceremonies in Palmdale, Calif.

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Digital mammograms benefit the young

Study: Older women can stick with X-rays

By **Marilynn Marchione**
Associated Press

Mammograms that use digital imaging to help doctors spot cancer are better than standard X-rays for young women and those with dense breasts, but others can skip the extra cost and get the old-fashioned kind, a landmark study concludes.

The study involved more than 40,000 women and was the largest ever to compare mammography screening techniques.

For most women who get mammograms — those past menopause with fatty breasts — “there’s no reason to seek digital ... film is just as good,” said the lead researcher, Dr. Etta Pisano, chief of breast imaging

at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

However, doctors still expect digital mammograms to become more common because of their many advantages, including that they can be stored on a computer and sent electronically whenever a woman moves or a new doctor needs to see them.

The study involved 42,760 women in the United States and Canada and was done by the American College of Radiology Imaging Network. It was funded by the National Cancer Institute.

Results were reported yesterday at a medical meeting and released online by the New England Journal of Medicine, which will publish them in its Oct. 27 edition.

Mammograms cut the risk of dying of breast cancer by up to 35 percent among women 50 and older, but only by 15 percent to

AT A GLANCE

▶ Mammograms that use digital imaging to spot cancer are better than standard X-rays for young women and those with dense breasts.

▶ Other women can skip the extra cost of the digital tests and have a standard mammogram.

▶ Digital tests are expected to become more common as more machines are put into use.

20 percent among younger women, who tend to have dense breasts that standard film X-rays have trouble penetrating.

Digital mammograms produce images on a computer screen, where they can be enhanced or magnified to reveal lurking signs of cancer. Doctors have hoped that this would improve mammography’s usefulness for younger women.

The study aimed to learn wheth-

er they correctly detected cancer and didn’t give too many false alarms.

Each participant received both types of mammograms. A total of 335 breast cancers were found. Both types of mammograms missed about 30 percent of them.

Digital mammograms proved 15 percent more accurate than standard film X-rays among women under 50, in whom breast cancer is relatively uncommon. Among women with dense breasts and those not yet in menopause, digital mammograms were 11 percent and 15 percent better, respectively.

For all other women, the techniques were equivalent. Pisano said the results should help prioritize who gets the more expensive tests.

“We don’t have enough digital mammography for everyone to get it and some women won’t benefit from it anyway,” Pisano said.