

# Bye-Bye, Breast Biopsy?

■ **FOUR OUT OF FIVE** women who get a biopsy following a worrisome mammogram find that the mass poses no threat. That's a lot of unnecessary discomfort, which helps explain why there's been so much buzz about elastography, an experimental ultrasound technique that appears to have startling accuracy.

Elastography capitalizes on a peculiar aspect of cancerous breast tissue: It tends to be stiffer than benign masses. "Picture a marble in a bowl of Jell-O," says Richard G. Barr, MD, a professor of radiology at Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine who has been testing the technology. "Then add slight compression." The compression comes from an ultrasound wand,

which a technician rolls over the breast. The image is fed directly into a specialized software program that measures the elasticity of suspicious tissue.

This winter, Barr reported the findings of a preliminary study at the annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America. A group of women who were scheduled to get a biopsy first received elastography. Following the biopsy, Barr and colleagues compared the results. The ultrasound predicted 17 out of 17 malignancies and 105 out of 106 benign lumps—a rate verging on 100 percent accuracy.

Cheryl Perkins, MD, senior clinical adviser for Susan G. Komen for the Cure, agrees the news is exciting, though the results need to be verified in larger studies. "It's a small study, and we have a lot more that we need to learn about elastography," she says. Trials are under way at two European sites, and there are plans to add several U.S. sites. Barr hopes to report more results this November.

—FRANCESCA COLTRERA

Ultrasound  
**VS.**  
Biopsy Needle:  
Soon You May Have a Choice

## Invisible Fitness Move

■ **WAITING IN LINE** doesn't have to be a waste of time. Karen Erickson, a New York City chiropractor and spokeswoman for the American Chiropractic Association, suggests using those minutes to stretch out your lower back and work on your abdominal muscles with this subtle move. Stand with your feet hip-width apart, making sure your

weight is equally distributed. Tuck in your tailbone and push your pubic bone forward while simultaneously tightening your abs and pushing your heels into the floor. Hold ten to 15 seconds, and repeat five times a day. The exercise can help ward off lower-back pain, Erickson says, and it's especially good if you sit at a desk all day. —RACHEL BERTSCHE

## Your Hunch Is Correct

■ **LEAN BACK AND RELAX—**your spine will thank you. Doctors in Scotland used a new form of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to scan 22 people while they were seated in different positions. Just ten minutes of sitting hunched forward or ramrod straight—with thighs at a 90 degree angle to the body—compressed the disks, placing strain on muscles of the lower back. But when people sat on a cushion with their hips slightly higher than their knees—the trunk and thighs were at a 135 degree angle—the spine remained close to its natural alignment, easing pressure on disks and keeping muscles relaxed. Try raising your chair high enough to put your hips above your knees, or sit on a cushion and recline slightly (see below). Those few degrees of difference may save you a lifetime of pain. —NAOMI BARR

