Consumers often have to decide whether to acquire information in high-stakes decision domains. We study women in mammography waiting rooms to test how a “false-alarm” result (i.e., an indication that a malady is present when a “more accurate” follow-up test reveals it is not) affects willingness to get retested. In Study 1 we show that, given a false-alarm result, life-threatening test consequences are associated with more disutility for future testing than when test consequences are less significant; this does not hold for normal test results. In Study 2 in the mammography context, we show that patients receiving a false-alarm result experienced more stress, were less likely to believe that a positive mammography result indicated cancer, and more likely to delay mammography than patients receiving normal results unless they were also told that they may be vulnerable to breast cancer in the future. We show that delays in planned adherence following a false-alarm result can be mitigated by an information intervention. Finally, we have preliminary evidence that a previous history of false-positive results can cause a consumer to both react more negatively to emotional stress and respond more positively to coping information.

(Value of Information; Decision Making Under Uncertainty; Medical Decision Making; Stress; Cancer False-Positive; Patient Preferences; Mammography; Medical Testing; High-Stakes Decisions)