



*Cancer Screening Programmes*

# BREAST SCREENING

OVER 70?  
You are still entitled to  
breast screening



Because we do not automatically invite women aged over 70 for breast screening, many believe they are not at risk of breast cancer. This is not true. This leaflet tells you more about what you can do and what you are entitled to.

## About breast cancer

Women over 70 years of age are more at risk of getting breast cancer than younger women. This is because the risk of getting breast cancer increases with age. About one-third of all breast cancers occur in women over the age of 70, so it is important to continue to be screened every three years.

## What is breast screening?

Breast screening is a way of detecting breast cancers, often at a very early stage. It involves a special kind of x-ray called a mammogram.

The NHS Breast Screening Programme is available free for all women aged 50 or over. Women aged between 50 and 70 are invited for screening every three years.

If you are aged over 70, we will not automatically invite you for breast screening. However, you do have the right to be screened every three years if you ask. All you need to do is phone or write to your local breast screening unit to make an appointment. You will find details about how to contact your local unit at the end of this leaflet.

## Why do I need to go for screening?

Breast screening can help to detect small changes in the breast before there are any other signs or symptoms. If changes are found early, there is a good chance of you making a successful recovery.

## What happens when I go for screening?

Your breast screening appointment may be in a hospital or at a local breast screening unit, or it may be on a mobile unit. The breast screening unit can help you to make a suitable appointment if you:

- need help with standing or undressing;
- need wheelchair access; or
- have a problem getting to the unit.

You should phone the breast screening office to discuss your needs.

The screening unit will be able to advise you even if your first language is not English, and there are also other sources of information for women from ethnic minority communities. You will find details for these, and for contacting your local breast screening unit, at the end of the leaflet.

When you arrive you will be seen by a female radiographer who will explain what will happen. Ask any questions you have about breast screening at this time.

You will need to undress to the waist to have your x-ray so it is a good idea to wear a skirt or trousers and a top. Do not use talcum powder or spray-on deodorant on the day you go for breast screening, as these may show up as white specks on your x-ray.

Your visit may take about 30 minutes, but the actual screening only takes about five minutes. Some women find the x-ray machine, which has to press the breast tightly, uncomfortable or even briefly painful, but it is only for a few seconds.

You may be given an information sheet before you leave which will tell you when and how you will get your results.

## What happens if something is found?

We ask about one in every 20 women screened to come to an assessment clinic because their x-ray suggests that more tests are needed. Sometimes this is necessary because the first x-rays were not clear enough and we need extra x-rays.

Being called back for more tests does not usually mean that you have cancer. Seven out of eight women who need further tests will not have cancer. Screening detects changes in your breast that may or may not be cancer. Most are harmless. Breast cancer is, of course, a possibility, but earlier treatment gives a better chance of successful treatment.

## What if I do have cancer?

Most breast cancers found at screening are at an early stage, giving you the best chance of successful treatment. Many women with breast cancer live a normal life following treatment.

It is not always possible to cure breast cancer completely but early diagnosis may offer more treatment options. Around two-thirds of the cancers that are found at screening are still small enough to be removed from the breast. This means that the whole breast does not have to be removed.



## Being 'breast aware'

Being 'breast aware' simply means getting to know how your breasts look and feel at different times, and telling your doctor straight away if you notice any changes. Breast tissue changes as you get older, and every woman's breasts are different.

Be aware of the following:

### Appearance

Any changes in the outline or shape of the breast, especially those caused by arm movements or by lifting the breasts. Any puckering or dimpling of the skin.

### Feelings

Discomfort or pain in one breast that is different from normal, particularly if it is new or persistent. But remember, it is a common misconception that all suspicious breast lumps are painful – many are not.

## Lumps

Any lumps, thickening or bumpy areas in one breast or armpit that seem to be different from the same part of the other breast and armpit. This is very important if this is new.

## Nipple change

Nipple discharge that you have not had before, or is blood-stained, or moist reddish areas that do not heal easily. Any change in nipple position (pulled in or pointing differently). A rash on or around the nipple.

You can become familiar with your breasts, by looking and feeling, at any time that is best for you (for example, in the bath, shower, or when dressing). Being breast aware and knowing what is normal for you will help you to be aware of any changes from normal, if these happen.

If you notice any change, tell your doctor immediately. Remember you are not wasting anyone's time. If there is a cancer, the sooner you report it, the more simple treatment is likely to be.

## Breast awareness five-point code

- 1 Know what is normal for you.
- 2 Look and feel.
- 3 Know what changes to look for.
- 4 Report any changes immediately.
- 5 Go for breast screening if you are aged 50 or over.

## If I go for screening, do I still need to be 'breast aware'?

Yes, all women need to be breast aware. No screening test is 100% accurate and although breast screening can detect cancers, it cannot prevent them. Continue to look and feel for any changes. If you notice any changes, see your doctor, even if you have recently had a breast x-ray or are due to have one soon.

## Important points to remember

All women are at risk of developing breast cancer. Breast cancer becomes more common as women get older, so it is important to be screened every three years. Always go when you are invited, and ask for screening if you are aged over 70.

The risk of dying from breast cancer is reduced for women who go for breast screening. In the UK, breast screening is estimated to save about 1400 lives each year.

Look and feel for what is normal in your breasts – be 'breast aware' – and tell your doctor straight away about any changes.

Men can also get breast cancer. Men with any symptoms or problems in the breast area should contact their doctor straight away.

## Who can I contact to find out more?

Your local NHS breast screening unit provides more information about screening and making an appointment. NHS Direct (0845 46 47) will be able to tell you how to contact them, or ask your family doctor.

The National Cancer Screening Programmes website provides more general information about breast screening and the breast screening programme. Visit [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk). You may want to read their leaflet called *Breast Screening – The Facts*, which has more detail about the benefits and difficulties of breast screening. It is available in several ethnic minority languages and on audio tape. You can find The Facts leaflet on the cancer screening website, or you can get a copy from your local breast screening unit.

Breast Cancer Care is a charity that offers information and support to those affected by breast cancer. You can contact Breast Cancer Care on their freephone helpline 0808 800 6000 (UK only) or textphone 0808 800 6001 or visit their website at [www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)

**Cancerbackup** provides information, counselling and emotional support to people concerned about cancer, their families and friends. All services are free and confidential. You can contact Cancerbackup on their freephone helpline **0808 800 1234**, or visit their website at [www.cancerbackup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk)

**Age Concern** supports all people aged over 50 in the UK, making sure that they get the most from life. They provide essential services such as day care and information as well as campaigning on issues like age discrimination and pensions, and working to influence public opinion and government policy about older people. You can find more information about their services on their website at [www.ace.org.uk](http://www.ace.org.uk) or you can call their information line on **0800 009966**.



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