

Breast Cancer

Signs, symptoms and screening



Key signs and symptoms to be aware of

01

Lump or swelling in the breast, chest or armpit

02

Skin changes, such as puckering or dimpling

03

Changes in size, shape or colour of breast

04

Nipple changes, inc. rash, crusting or discharge

These symptoms can be caused by conditions other than cancer, but it's important to get them checked by a GP.

Breast screening basics and next steps

What is breast screening?

Breast screening looks for cancers when they're too small to see or feel. It saves over 1,300 lives every year in the UK, so it's important to attend screenings when invited, and to talk to your GP if you notice any changes.

Who is breast screening for?

Women aged 50–71 will be invited every three years. Transgender women and transgender men who have not had top surgery are also eligible.

How will you be invited for screening?

If you are registered with a GP you will automatically be sent an appointment for breast screening every three years between 50 and 71. After 71 you'll need to contact your local screening unit to book an appointment.

Where do screening appointments take place?

- Special breast screening clinics
- Local or regional hospitals, in the X-ray or breast imaging department
- Dedicated mobile screening units often parked outside local health centres or supermarket car parks
- Your invitation letter will explain the options available in your area, and the NHS website also lists screening locations and opening times.

When should you contact a GP?

- ✓ If you notice any of the symptoms on page 1
- ✓ If symptoms persist or feel unusual for you
- ✓ If your breast screening is overdue
- ✓ If you feel worried – it's always better to check

67%

Of women aged 35–55+ worry about getting breast cancer

27–31%

Delay screening because they have no symptoms

13%

Of women eligible for breast screening report being behind on appointments

Common myths about breast screening

Myth “If I feel fine, I don’t need screening”

Fact Early stage breast cancer often has no symptoms. You can feel completely well and still need screening.

Myth “Screening is painful”

Fact Mammograms can be uncomfortable, but shouldn’t be painful, and only last a few seconds.

Myth “No family history means I don’t need screening”

Fact Only 5–10% of breast cancers are caused by an inherited altered gene, so it’s important for everyone over 50 to attend screening when invited.

Myth “Mammograms cause cancer from radiation”

Fact The radiation dose from a standard mammogram is very low – comparable to just a few weeks of natural background radiation.

Myth “Screening isn’t available over 70”

Fact Women can still take part in breast screening beyond age 71 by request.

Myth “Trans and non-binary people don’t need it”

Fact Breast screening is for anyone aged 50–71 who has breasts due to natural or hormone-therapy oestrogen, which includes many transgender and non-binary people.