

Breast Cancer

Awareness, prevention
and support



What is breast cancer?

Cancer that starts in the breast tissue – the most common cancer in the UK.

What causes breast cancer?

The exact cause of breast cancer is often not known, but several factors can increase risk, including getting older, being a woman, family history and lifestyle factors.

Who can get breast cancer?

Most breast cancers (80%) occur in women over 50. The older you are, the higher your risk, but younger women can be affected too, so it's important to be breast aware whatever your age.

Men can get breast cancer too, though this is rare and usually affects men over 60.

What if someone has a family history of breast cancer?

People with a family history of breast cancer should check with their GP. They may be referred to a genetic counsellor, who can assess their risk and talk through regular tests and risk-reducing measures that might be recommended.

Why is breast screening important?

Breast screening looks for cancers when they're too small to see or feel. It saves thousands of 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 eligible for breast screening?

Women aged 50 to 71 are invited for a mammogram every three years. Transgender women, and transgender men who haven't had top surgery, are also eligible.

How is breast screening offered?

If you're registered with a GP you'll automatically be invited every three years between 50 and 71. After 71, contact your local screening centre to book an appointment.

67%

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

57–58%

Would be more likely to attend screening with virtual support

13%

Of women eligible for breast screening report being behind on appointments

What happens during a breast screening appointment?

Breast screening is carried out by a specialist female mammographer. Most appointments follow the same simple steps and results usually arrive within two weeks by letter, with a copy sent to your GP.

- You'll undress in private above the waist, and a female mammographer positions each breast for the X-ray.
- Each breast is held briefly between two plates while an X-ray is taken – it only takes a few seconds.
- The whole appointment, covering both breasts, takes no more than 30 minutes.



What signs or symptoms should people be aware of?

Visit your GP if you notice any of these changes to your breast, chest or armpit, at any time between screening appointments:

- Lump or swelling in the breast, chest or armpit
- Skin changes, such as puckering or dimpling
- Changes in the colour of the breast
- Nipple changes, such as becoming pulled in
- Rash, crusting or discharge from the nipple
- Changes in size or shape of the breast

These symptoms can be caused by many things other than cancer, but if they're new for you, it's important to get them checked by a GP.

- If you notice any of these changes
- If symptoms persist or feel unusual for you
- If your breast screening is overdue
- If you feel worried – it's always better to check



What happens after a screening appointment?

You'll usually get your results within two weeks, sent by letter with a copy to your GP. Most people are told there's no sign of breast cancer and are invited again in three years. A smaller number are asked back for further tests, such as another mammogram, an ultrasound or a biopsy – this doesn't automatically mean cancer.

Do these symptoms mean someone definitely has breast cancer?

No. These symptoms can be caused by many things other than cancer. Breast screening is also offered to transgender women, and to transgender men who haven't had top surgery – speak to your GP if you're not automatically invited.