



CANCER RESEARCH UK



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### Screening

In England, Wales and Scotland, women aged 50 to 70 are offered screening for breast cancer every three years. In England the programme is being extended to include women aged 47 to 73. In Northern Ireland, women aged 50 to 64 are invited for breast screening.

Screening involves taking x-rays of the breasts (mammography). Breast screening can find cancers at an early stage when they are too small for you to notice. When changes are found early, there is an excellent chance of successful treatment.

It is important to attend screening whenever you are invited.

All women over 50 are eligible for breast screening. If you are over 70 (or over 64 if you live in Northern Ireland), speak to your doctor who can arrange an appointment for you.

Breast screening is effective, but it is not perfect. Do not forget to keep a check on your breasts, even if you have been for screening.

### Early detection saves lives

Be 'breast aware' and follow the five point code:

- know what is normal for you
- look at and feel your breasts
- know what changes to look for
- report any changes without delay
- go for breast screening if you are 50 or over.

Your breasts may feel different depending on the time of the month and your stage of life. When you know how they normally look and feel, you will be able to spot any unusual changes. Check yourself in a way that is comfortable for you, perhaps in the bath or shower.

### What changes should I look for?

It is often women themselves who first notice their breast cancer. Most changes are not caused by cancer, but it is very important to report anything unusual to your doctor. Look for:

- changes in the size, shape or feel of your breasts
- a new lump or thickening in one breast or armpit
- any puckering, dimpling or redness of the skin
- changes in the position of the nipple, a rash or nipple discharge
- pain or discomfort that is new to you and felt only on one side.

Breast screening for the over 50s and breast awareness for all women, offer the best chance of finding breast cancer early.

### Further information

For more about the signs and symptoms of cancer visit [www.spotcancerearly.com](http://www.spotcancerearly.com)

For more about cancer visit our patient information website [www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone **0808 800 4040**.

Our health messages are based on scientific evidence. Find out more at [www.cancerresearchuk.org/health](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health)

All our leaflets are thoroughly researched and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. They are reviewed externally by independent experts and updated regularly. You can order our full range of leaflets free online at [www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets)

### About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the world's leading charity dedicated to research into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer. If you would like to support our work, please call **020 7121 6699** or visit our website [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

*Together we will beat cancer*

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(1089464) and Scotland (SC041666)



# Detecting breast cancer and how to reduce your risk





## Breast cancer facts

**More women survive breast cancer today thanks to earlier detection and better treatments. But it is a common disease and the number of cases is rising.**

**This leaflet contains information about risk factors for breast cancer and how you can be breast aware. If you notice any changes in the look or feel of a breast, it is important to tell your doctor without delay. Breast screening saves lives – be sure to attend screening whenever you are invited.**

### How common is it?

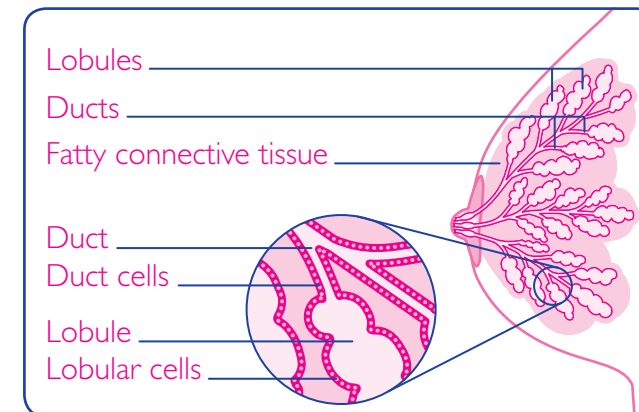
Breast cancer is now the most common cancer in the UK. More than 100 women are diagnosed with the disease every day. The risk of breast cancer increases with age. Four out of five cases occur after the age of 50.

Men can also get breast cancer but it is very rare.

### What is breast cancer?

The breast is made up of millions of cells. Breast cancer develops when a single cell begins to multiply out of control and forms a tumour. Some cells may break away and travel to other parts of the body starting new tumours.

The breast consists of fatty tissue and lobules that are connected to the nipple by ducts. Breast cancer usually starts in a cell lining a duct or lobule.



### What affects your risk?

#### Age

The risk of developing breast cancer is strongly linked to age. The older you are, the greater your chances of developing the disease.

#### Family history

Breast cancer is common and many women have a family history of the disease. A history of breast cancer in the family puts you at slightly increased risk, but most women with one or two affected relatives will not develop breast cancer.

Your risk is greater if your mother, sister or daughter had breast cancer before the age of 40, or if two or more close relatives have been affected at any age. If you have a strong family history and are worried about your risk, discuss this with your doctor. If appropriate, they will refer you to a breast care unit or genetics clinic.

#### Menstruation

Starting your periods at a younger age or having a late menopause increases the risk.

#### HRT

Hormone replacement therapy increases the risk of breast cancer. Your risk increases the longer you take it, and decreases gradually after you stop taking it. If you have any worries it is best to consult your doctor.

#### The Pill

Taking oral contraceptives may cause a small increase in risk, but your risk gradually returns to normal after you stop taking them.

#### Obesity

Being overweight after the menopause increases a woman's risk of breast cancer, as body fat affects hormone levels. Try to maintain a healthy weight. Combine a balanced, low fat diet with regular exercise.

#### Alcohol

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer. The more you drink each day, the greater your risk.

### What decreases your risk?

#### Physical activity

Women who are physically active have a lower risk of breast cancer than less active women. Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five times a week. The more active you are, the more you reduce your risk.

#### Breastfeeding

The longer a woman breastfeeds her children, the lower her risk of breast cancer.

#### Having children

The more children a woman has, the lower her risk of breast cancer. Being younger when you have your children also decreases your risk.