



## 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.

Across the UK, 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.

All women over 70 are entitled to breast screening, but they are not routinely invited. To make an appointment, talk to your GP or breast screening unit.

Breast screening is effective, but it is not perfect. As well as picking up cancers that need treating, it can also pick up cancers that will not cause any problems in a woman's lifetime. This means that some women will receive treatment they don't need. It's important that women can make an informed choice about whether to be screened.

Breast screening remains an effective way of detecting breast cancer at an early stage when treatment is most likely to be successful. But it is not the only way to spot breast cancer early. It's important that women get to know how their breasts normally look and feel, so they can spot any changes more easily. If you notice any unusual change to the size, feel or shape of your breasts, it's worth checking with your doctor.

## Early detection saves lives

Be 'breast aware':

- know what is normal for you
- look at and feel your breasts
- know what changes to look for
- report any changes without delay.

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 more likely 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.

If you notice any of these or any other unusual changes to your breasts, it's worth seeing your doctor.

## 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*

# Detecting breast cancer and how to reduce your risk





## Breast cancer facts

**More women are surviving breast cancer than ever before, 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 the things that affect the risk of developing 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.**

### How common is it?

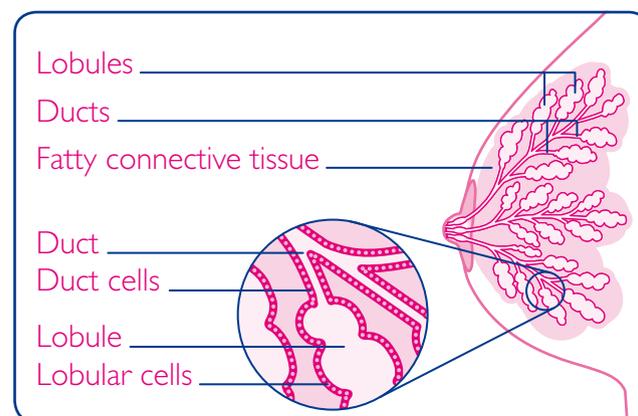
Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK. More than 100 women are diagnosed with the disease every day. The risk of breast cancer increases with age. Four out of five breast cancers are in women aged 50 and over.

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

Women with a strong family history of breast cancer have a higher risk of developing the disease themselves. Risk increases with the number of close relatives diagnosed with breast cancer. But even so, eight out of nine breast cancers occur in women without a family history of the disease.

If you have a strong family history and are worried about your risk, it is best to speak to your doctor. If appropriate, they may 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 concerns about HRT, see your doctor.

#### 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 children also decreases your risk.

#### The Pill

Taking oral contraceptives slightly increases the risk, but your risk gradually returns to normal after you stop taking them.

### What reduces your risk?

#### Healthy weight

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 by combining a balanced, low fat diet with regular physical activity.

#### Limiting alcohol

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer. The more you cut down on alcohol, the more you can reduce the risk of breast cancer and many other cancers.

#### 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 five times or more a week. The more active you are, the more you can reduce the risk.

#### Not smoking

Some recent research suggests that smoking may increase the risk of breast cancer.