



Public Health  
England



# NHS Breast Screening Programme

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.

## Breast screening

Breast screening is a way of detecting breast cancer, often at a very early stage. It involves x-rays called mammograms.

If you are aged over 70, we will not automatically invite you for breast screening. However, you do have the right to free screening every 3 years if you ask. All you need to do is phone or write to your local breast screening unit to make an appointment. For details of your local unit, visit: [www.nhs.uk/breastscreening](http://www.nhs.uk/breastscreening).

## Why older women should consider continuing breast 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. If you are over 70 you are more at risk of getting

breast cancer than a younger woman. This is because the risk of getting breast cancer increases with age. About one-third (1 in 3) of all breast cancers occur in women over the age of 70. This means it is important to continue to be screened every 3 years if you think screening is right for you.

If you have previously had breast cancer, you can still be at risk. As long as you still have breast tissue, you can ask for screening every 3 years.

## Before going for breast screening

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

- need help dressing or undressing
- need wheelchair access
- have a problem getting to your appointment
- have breast implants

Please phone your local breast screening unit to discuss your needs.

Screening staff will be able to help you even if

your first language is not English. We can provide information about breast screening in a range of languages and in an easy read format. You will find these at:

[www.gov.uk/government/collections/breast-screening-information-leaflets](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/breast-screening-information-leaflets)

## Your screening appointment

When you arrive you will be seen by a female mammographer who will explain what will happen. She will check your details, and ask about any breast problems you may have had. You can ask her any questions you have about breast screening.

You will need to undress to the waist to have your x-rays so it is a good idea to wear a skirt or trousers and a top.

The whole appointment takes less than half an hour, and the mammograms take only a few minutes.

The mammographer will place your breast onto the mammogram machine and lower a plastic plate onto it to flatten it. This keeps your breast still so that we can get clear x-rays. The mammographer will take 2 x-rays of each breast.

## What happens if something is found

We ask about 1 in every 20 women screened to come to an assessment clinic because more tests are needed. Sometimes women are called back because their 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 8 women who need further tests will **not** have cancer. If we do diagnose cancer, earlier treatment gives a better chance of successful treatment.

## If breast cancer is diagnosed

Most breast cancers found at screening are at an early stage. This means treatment is more likely to be successful. 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 2 out of 3 cancers 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 (mastectomy).

Not all breast cancers will cause harm during a woman's lifetime, even if they aren't treated. However doctors cannot always tell which cancers will become life-threatening or not. This means we offer treatment to all women with breast cancer.

### Clinical trials for women diagnosed with cancer

You may be offered to take part in a clinical trial. These are used to gather information about the best types of treatment for breast cancer, so we can help women more effectively in the future. The doctor will talk about any available trials with you, so that you can decide if you want to take part or not.

### 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 unusual changes. Breast tissue changes as you get older, and every woman's breasts are different.

It is important that you continue to look at and check your breasts regularly, even if you have just had a mammogram.

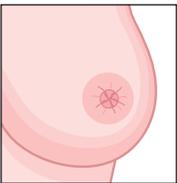
## Look for unusual changes



Lump - may not be seen but might be felt



Skin texture such as dimpling or puckering



Appearance or direction of nipple



Nipple discharge



Rash or crusting

It's as simple as TLC...

**TOUCH** your breasts. Can you feel anything unusual?

**LOOK** for changes. Is there any change in shape or texture?

**CHECK** anything unusual with your doctor

The above images and TLC information are reproduced with permission of Breast Cancer Now.

Although it is rare, men can get breast cancer too. Men with symptoms should speak to their doctor as soon as possible.

**First published:** Jan 2007

**Updated:** Nov 2017

**Review due:** Nov 2020

**Leaflet reference:** © Crown copyright 2017

**Cover image:** Rawpixel.com/Shutterstock

**More information about breast screening:**  
[www.nhs.uk/breast](http://www.nhs.uk/breast)

**Order this leaflet:**  
[www.gov.uk/phe/screening-leaflets](http://www.gov.uk/phe/screening-leaflets)

Re-use of Crown copyright material (excluding logos) is allowed under the terms of the Open Government Licence, for terms and conditions visit

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/)

**PHE publications gateway number: 2017647**

