

# Breast screening



Helping you decide



healthier  
scotland  
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

This resource is available in Urdu, Chinese and Polish, and in an Easy Read format. NHS Health Scotland is happy to consider requests for other languages and formats. Please contact 0131 314 5300 or email [nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net)

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The statistics described in this booklet are taken from the most up-to-date sources from Information Service Division, the Department of Health, and The Information Centre for Health and Social Care. Full references can be found at [www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast)

It is your choice whether to have breast screening or not. This leaflet aims to help you decide.

## Why does the NHS offer breast screening?

The NHS offers breast screening to reduce the number of women who die from breast cancer. Screening does this by finding breast cancers at an early stage when they are too small to see or feel. Breast screening does not prevent you from getting breast cancer.

Screening saves lives from breast cancer, but it does have some risks. Some women who have screening will be diagnosed and treated for breast cancer that would never otherwise have been found or caused them harm. This is discussed further on pages 9–11.

You may find it helpful to:

- visit [www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast)
- contact the NHS inform helpline on **0800 22 44 88** (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88). The helpline is open every day 8 am to 10 pm and also provides an interpreting service.
- talk to your friends and family who have already attended.

All women aged  
between 50 and  
70 are invited to  
breast screening.



# Who is offered breast screening in Scotland and why?

Approximately every three years NHSScotland invites all women aged between 50 and 70 for breast screening.

## Women aged between 50 and 70

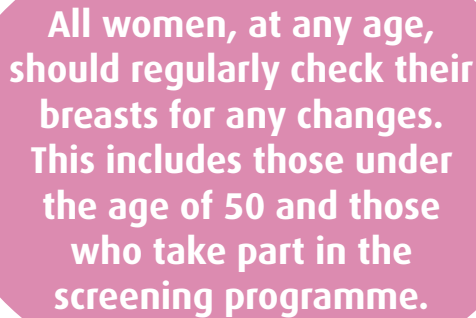
Evidence tells us that the risk of developing breast cancer increases with age and that finding breast cancer is most effective using breast X-rays (mammograms) in women who have reached menopause.

## Women over the age of 70

You are still welcome to come for screening every three years, although you will not automatically be invited. To make an appointment you can phone your local screening centre (see inner back cover for details). You remain at increasing risk of developing breast cancer and should **regularly check your breasts for changes** (see pages 12 and 13) and contact your GP if you are concerned.



8 out of 10 breast cancers are found in women aged 50 and over.



All women, at any age, should regularly check their breasts for any changes. This includes those under the age of 50 and those who take part in the screening programme.

## What are the benefits of breast screening?

- Screening can find breast cancer before any symptoms become noticeable.
- The earlier breast cancer is found, the better your chance of surviving it.
- In general the less advanced the cancer, the less extensive the treatment required.



## What are the risks of being screened?

- Mammograms do not find all cancers. This is why **it's important to keep regularly checking your breasts for any changes** (see pages 12 and 13) between screenings.
- There is a possibility of being diagnosed with a cancer that may not have otherwise caused you harm (see pages 9 and 10) and you may have to make some difficult decisions about treatment.
- X-rays used in breast screening can very rarely cause breast cancer. Having mammograms every three years for 20 years very slightly increases the chance of getting cancer over a woman's lifetime.
- The breast screening process can cause some embarrassment, anxiety and physical discomfort.



### Does screening prevent breast cancer?

**No. Screening can detect cancer at an early stage, before it can be seen or felt, but it can only find cancer if it is already there.**

## How will I know when to go?

When you get your appointment will depend on which GP practice you are registered with, which may mean that you are invited at different times to other women your age. You should get your first invitation before your 53rd birthday. If you haven't, please contact your local screening centre (see inner back cover for details). Please also contact your local screening centre if you have moved house or GP practice and are concerned that you may have missed an invitation for screening.

## Where do I go for breast screening?

Depending on where you live, you will be invited to either a mobile screening unit or one of the six screening centres in Scotland. The numbers for the Scottish screening centres can be found on the inner back cover of this leaflet.



**Breast screening usually takes place at your local screening centre or mobile unit.**

**Not every breast cancer is found during breast screening because some cancers don't show up at all on mammograms. A small number of breast cancers may not be seen on the mammograms by the people reading them.**

## What happens during breast screening?

Your appointment will usually take no more than half an hour and the mammogram itself only takes a few minutes.

This stage of the breast screening process is carried out by female staff only (mammographers). The mammographer will ask you a few questions and will explain what will happen. You can ask your mammographer questions at any time.

You will be asked to undress from the waist up. Therefore, you may find it more helpful to wear trousers or a skirt. Your privacy will be respected at all times and you can cover up with your own top when you aren't having the mammogram itself.

Please don't use talcum powder or spray deodorant when you go for screening. Roll-on deodorant does not affect the mammograms.



**A mammogram only takes a few minutes.**



## What does a mammogram feel like?

Your mammographer will position one breast at a time between two special plates on the mammogram machine and will take two pictures of each breast. Your breast needs to be pressed firmly between the plates for a few seconds so that the mammographer can take a good image. You will have to stay as still as possible for a few seconds while the images are taken. You cannot feel the X-ray itself. Remember, you are in control and can say 'stop' at any time if you feel too uncomfortable.

## When do I get the results?

Your results letter will be sent to your home address within three weeks. Your GP will also be sent a copy of your results. If your results do not arrive within three weeks please contact your local screening centre.

**Some women find the test uncomfortable or embarrassing, but remember that the mammographer is a health professional who carries out many mammograms every day.**

## What mammogram results might I get?

You will receive one of three results letters:

- The majority of women will be told that their **mammograms are clear** and that they will be invited for breast screening again in three years time. This means your mammogram shows no sign of cancer. However, you may still develop breast cancer so you should stay **'breast aware'** (see pages 12 and 13).
- A very small number of women will be asked for a **'technical recall'**. This means your mammogram is not of adequate quality, which can occur if not all the breast tissue was imaged or the breast tissue was moved during the mammogram. This means you will be asked to return for a repeat mammogram.
- Around 5 in 100 women will be invited to the **second stage of screening** to attend an appointment for further tests. This means your mammogram may be showing an area the doctors would like to image more clearly. Around 4 out of 5 women who are invited for further tests are found not to have breast cancer, and 1 will be found to have breast cancer.

If you are invited to the second stage of screening you may receive a clinical breast examination, more mammograms and/or an ultrasound scan. Some women will also need a biopsy. A biopsy is when a small sample of tissue is removed (you will be offered a local anaesthetic for this). We carry out these tests to find out whether you have breast cancer.

# If you have breast cancer

## What is breast cancer?

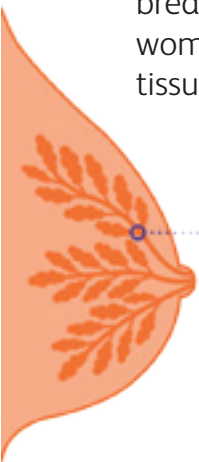
Breast cancer starts when cells in the breast begin to grow in an uncontrolled way and form a lump (also known as a tumour). As the tumour grows, cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body and this can be life-threatening.

## Invasive breast cancer

Out of 100 women diagnosed with breast cancer through screening, about 80 will have invasive breast cancer. This is cancer that has grown out of the milk ducts and into the surrounding breast. Most invasive breast cancer will spread to other parts of the body if left untreated.

## Non-invasive breast cancer

Out of 100 women diagnosed with breast cancer through screening, about 20 will have non-invasive breast cancer. This means there are cancer cells in the breast, but they are only found inside the milk ducts (tubes) within the breast and have not spread any further. This is also called 'ductal carcinoma in situ' (DCIS). In some women with non-invasive breast cancer, the cancer cells stay inside the ducts. In other women they will grow into (invade) the surrounding breast tissue in the future.



Normal milk duct



Non-invasive  
breast cancer



Invasive  
breast cancer

When a woman is diagnosed with non-invasive breast cancer, doctors can't tell whether it will grow into the surrounding breast or not.

## Treatment

Doctors cannot always tell whether a breast cancer that is diagnosed will go on to be life-threatening or not. Whether your cancer is invasive or non-invasive, you will be offered treatment and care from a team of breast cancer specialists. The treatment may include surgery (which may mean a mastectomy), hormone therapy, radiotherapy and possibly chemotherapy too. While these treatments save lives, they can cause serious, long-term side effects. If there are choices about your treatment, you will receive information and support to help decide what is right for you.

## Making a choice

It is your choice whether or not to have breast screening. The following statistics may help you make a decision that is right for you.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women. Around 4,800 women are diagnosed with breast cancer every year in Scotland.


In Scotland, about 1,000 women die of breast cancer each year.

For every 400 women screened regularly for 10 years, one less woman will die from breast cancer. This means around 130 women are prevented from dying from breast cancer each year in Scotland.

About 9 out of 1,000 women screened will be found to have breast cancer. Of these, about 2 will be diagnosed and offered treatment (see page 9) for a breast cancer that would never otherwise have been found and would not have been life threatening.

Breast screening is an area that has been recently considered by a group of experts and they estimate that for every 1 woman who has her life saved from breast cancer through breast screening, 3 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer that might never have become life threatening.

If this is a concern for you, please speak to a health professional. You can also visit [www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast) for more information. You can also contact the NHS inform helpline on **0800 22 44 88** (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88). The helpline is open every day 8 am to 10 pm and also provides an interpreting service.



Breast screening  
could stop me  
dying from  
breast cancer

Breast screening  
could mean that I  
am diagnosed and  
treated for a cancer  
that would never  
have become  
life threatening



## Be breast aware

Being breast aware is about getting to know your own body so that you can spot any changes to your breasts early on. The most important things you need to know about breast awareness are what is normal for you and that you should tell your GP about any changes as soon as you spot them.

**Remember you can develop breast cancer at any time. This includes the time in between breast screening appointments**

**DON'T GET SCARED,  
GET CHECKED**

It is common for women of all ages to find changes to their breasts themselves (partners may also notice changes), so checking your breasts regularly is important. You can do this in the bath or shower, when you use body lotion, or when you get dressed.

Changes in your breasts (including the area up to your armpit) may be harmless, but you should get them checked straight away. You need to look out for:

- a lump, area of thickened tissue or bumps in either breast
- a change in the size or shape of one or both breasts
- a lump or swelling in either of your armpits
- skin that appears like orange peel
- crusting on or around the nipple
- a leaking nipple which may or may not be streaked with blood
- dimples or skin that's become drawn in
- a nipple that's become turned in.

Men can also get breast cancer and there are around 29 new male breast cancer cases a year in Scotland.

Visit [NHS inform](#) for information on Detect Cancer Early.

## What happens if...

### **...I have not accepted previous invitations for breast screening, can I still attend?**

Yes. Although you get the best out of screening by attending every time you are invited, you can attend even if you have not been before.

### **...I have had mammograms elsewhere?**

You can still attend, if the mammograms were taken more than six months ago. If you have had mammograms taken more recently, please contact the screening centre to discuss whether you need to attend.

### **...I have previously had breast cancer?**

Please contact your screening centre to discuss your appointment.

### **...I need an interpreter at my appointment?**

If you need the assistance of an interpreter, please contact your local screening centre to let us know when you receive your appointment letter so that arrangements can be made.

### **...I need to claim travel expenses?**

If you are on income support, you can reclaim your expenses. For more information please contact the NHS inform helpline on **0800 22 44 88** (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88). The helpline is open every day 8 am to 10 pm and also provides an interpreting service.



### ...I would like to be accompanied for screening?

Your breast screening examination will be carried out by a female mammographer. You are welcome to bring someone along with you if it would be helpful, **but please note that men and children are not allowed to enter the mobile units**. Please contact the screening centre before your appointment if you would like to bring someone, or if you would rather reschedule your appointment.

### ...I have access needs?

Please contact the centre, even if you have attended in the past. This will allow us to arrange a suitable appointment for you.

### ...I have implants, can I still go for screening?

Yes. Please contact the centre and a leaflet with further information will be sent to you. If your appointment has been made for a mobile screening unit, it may need to be changed to a screening centre where specialised equipment is available.

### ...I choose not to go for screening?

Please call the screening centre to let them know that you will not be attending your appointment. If you later decide to attend screening, you will be able to make a new appointment. You will be invited for screening again in three years. If you do not want to be invited again, ask the screening centre for a disclaimer form so that your name can be removed from the system. If you change your mind at any time, you can ask to be added back onto the system. Your decision will not affect any breast cancer care you receive from your GP or hospital.

## What happens to my mammograms after screening?

Screening information is treated in the strictest confidence and is used to ensure that the breast screening service meets agreed standards, as well as to identify areas for improvement. Only authorised staff and appropriate healthcare professionals have access to this information.

If you need more information about NHS record-keeping, you can phone the NHS inform helpline on **0800 22 44 88** (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88). The helpline is open every day 8 am to 10 pm and also provides an interpreting service.

## More information and support

NHS inform Screening Scotland web pages provide further information about breast screening in Scotland:  
**[www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast)**

NHS inform Detect Cancer Early web pages provide support and advice about spotting the signs and symptoms of cancer, including breast cancer, as early as possible:  
**[www.nhsinform.co.uk/cancer/scotland/dce](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/cancer/scotland/dce)**

For information regarding your health rights and confidentiality, visit **[www.hris.org.uk](http://www.hris.org.uk)**

# Scottish Breast Screening Centres

## North of Scotland (Inverness)

Tel: **01463 705416**

## North East of Scotland (Aberdeen)

Tel: **01224 550570**

## West of Scotland (Glasgow)

Tel: **0141 800 8800**

Textphone: **0141 800 8858**

## South West of Scotland (Irvine)

Tel: **01294 323505** or **323506** or **323507**

## East of Scotland (Dundee)

Tel: **01382 425646**

## South East of Scotland (Edinburgh)

Tel: **0131 537 7400**

The Scottish Breast Screening Programme is regularly reviewed to make sure we offer the best possible service to you. If you have a complaint, or want to make a comment about the service you received, please write to the Clinical Director at the screening centre you attended. You will find the address at:

**[www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast/screeningcentres](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/screening/breast/screeningcentres)**

If you have a comment about the content of this information leaflet, please contact NHS Health Scotland:  
email: **[nhs.healthscotland-publications@nhs.net](mailto:nhs.healthscotland-publications@nhs.net)**  
post: Publications, NHS Health Scotland, Gyle Square,  
1 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9EB

This publication is available online at [www.healthscotland.com](http://www.healthscotland.com) or telephone **0131 314 5300**.

## Traditional Chinese

您也可以登入 **www.healthscotland.com** 瀏覽本刊物，或撥打 **0131 314 5300** 查詢。

## Polish

Ta publikacja jest dostępna online na stronie **www.healthscotland.com** lub pod numerem telefonu **0131 314 5300**, gdzie można także zgłaszać wszelkie zapytania.

## Urdu

یہ اشاعت آن لائن **www.healthscotland.com** پر دستیاب ہے  
یا کسی سوالات کے لیے **0131 314 5300** پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔

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