

breast cancer

spot the **changes** early



...and why screening is important

CANCER RESEARCH UK



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's important to tell your doctor without delay. Breast screening saves lives - be sure to attend screening whenever you are invited.

How common is it?

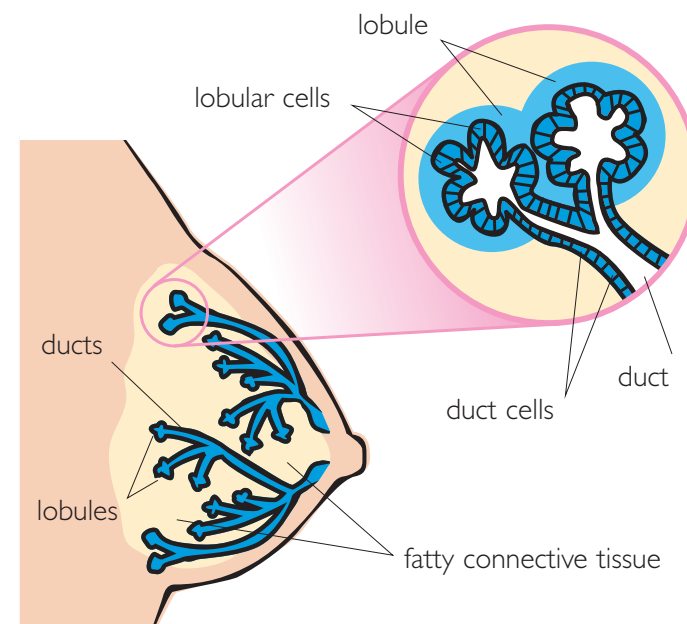
Breast cancer is now the **most common cancer** in the UK. **More than 100 women are diagnosed with the disease every day.** The risk of breast cancer increases with age. Four out of five cases occur after the age of 50.

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?

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

Women's risk of breast cancer

by age 30	1 in 1,900
40	1 in 200
50	1 in 50
60	1 in 23
70	1 in 15
over a lifetime	1 in 9

What increases your risk?

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 get breast cancer.

Your risk is greater if a close relative had breast cancer before the age of 50, or if two or more close relatives have been affected. 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. Risk increases the longer you take it, and decreases gradually after you stop taking it. If you have any worries it's 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 body 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?

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.

Screening

In the UK women aged between 50 and 64 are offered screening for breast cancer every three years. The programme is gradually being extended to include women up to 70 years old. Screening involves taking x-rays of the breasts (mammography).

Breast screening can show 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.

If you are 65 or over, speak to your doctor who can arrange a screening appointment for you.

Breast screening is effective, but it is not perfect. Don't 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's 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 cancer visit our patient information website www.cancerhelp.org.uk click on 'specific cancers' then 'breast cancer'.

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our **information nurses**. Direct line **020 7061 8355** or freephone 0800 CANCER / 0800 226 237 or email cancer.info@cancer.org.uk

Order copies of this and other cancer awareness leaflets online at www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets or call **020 7061 8333**.

About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the leading charity dedicated to research on the causes, treatment and prevention of cancer. If you would like to support our work please call **020 7009 8820** or visit our website.

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