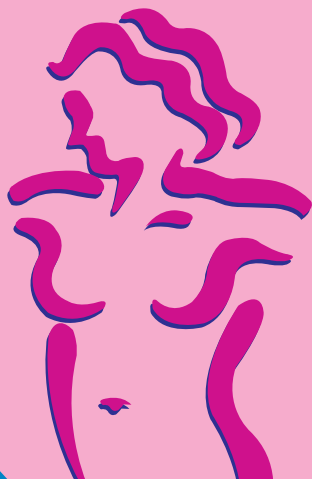


Breast screening



Your
early
warning
system

All women aged 50 to 64 in Northern Ireland are invited to have their breasts screened every three years by a special x-ray known as a mammogram. Women aged 65 or over are not automatically called for screening but can make an appointment through their local screening centre (see back cover).



Why do I need breast screening?

Breast screening reduces the risk of dying from breast cancer.

- Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among women in Northern Ireland - 1 in 12 women will develop breast cancer before the age of 75.
- Breast cancer is more common and easier to detect in women over 50.
- Breast screening can help find breast cancer at an early stage before there are any signs or symptoms.
- If breast cancer is found at an early stage there is a good chance of a successful recovery.

What happens when I attend?

Your visit for screening may take up to 30 minutes. For your x-ray you will have to undress from the waist up, so it is a good idea to wear a separate top. The radiographic staff, who are all female, will place each breast in turn between two special x-ray plates. The x-ray itself takes only a few seconds and involves a tiny dose of radiation.

Where do I go?

Depending on where you live, you will be invited to attend either your local screening centre (see back cover) or a mobile unit. Both perform the same function but the mobile screening units have restricted access, so if you have limited mobility you may find it easier to attend the screening centre. If you have breast implants you should attend the screening centre rather than the mobile unit.

Does breast screening hurt?

Some women may find the x-ray a bit uncomfortable as the breasts have to be held firmly in position and some pressure applied to get the best possible picture. However, the x-ray doesn't take long and many women find it less uncomfortable the next time.

When do I get my results?

Your results will generally be sent to you and your GP within 3 weeks.

What does it mean if I am called back?

Around 1 woman in 20 is called back for a second visit. This is because the result suggests that other tests are needed. This does not necessarily mean there is something wrong - 4 out of 5 women recalled are given normal results following these additional tests.

How reliable is breast screening?

It is the most reliable way of detecting breast cancer early. However, it is not perfect. Some cancers, even though they are there, cannot be seen on x-ray. Others can be difficult to see.

Does breast screening prevent breast cancer?

No. Breast screening helps to detect breast cancer at an early stage when treatment may be more successful. However, it can only help to find breast cancer if it is already there. Breast cancer can develop at any time. Some women will develop breast cancer between screening visits. You should check your breasts regularly for any changes. If you have any worries contact your GP, even if you have had a recent x-ray.

What happens to my x-rays once they have been read?

Your x-rays are kept for at least 8 years. This allows them to be compared with future x-rays that may be taken. Screening x-rays may be reviewed to ensure you receive a high quality service.

Where did you obtain my contact details?

Your details were obtained from your GP's list, so it is important that your GP always has your correct name and address. Each GP practice is contacted every 3 years for a list of women aged 50-64 in their practice. As long as you are registered with your GP you will be invited for breast screening by your 53rd birthday.



What if I am under 50 years of age?

Routine breast screening is not offered to women under 50 because:

- the risk of breast cancer in this group is much lower;
- women in this group have denser breast tissue which makes the x-rays much more difficult to read.

However, if you are worried about a breast problem or have a family history of breast cancer you should contact your GP who will refer you for a specialist opinion and tests, if necessary.

If you have any questions please contact your GP or local screening centre.

Screening centres

Eastern Health and Social Services Board

The Screening Centre
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS
Tel: 028 9033 3700

Northern Health and Social Services Board

Northern Area Breast Screening and Assessment Unit
Level A, Antrim Area Hospital
45 Bush Road, Antrim BT41 2RL
Tel: 028 9442 4425

Southern Health and Social Services Board

The Breast Screening Unit
Lurgan Hospital
Sloan Street, Lurgan BT66 8NX
Tel: 028 3834 7083

Western Health and Social Services Board

The Breast Screening Unit
Ground Floor, The Nurses' Home
Altnagelvin Area Hospital
Glenshane Road, Londonderry BT47 6SB
Tel: 028 7161 1443

This leaflet is available in other languages and on audio tape on request from your screening centre - see the website: www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/phealth



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