

Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among women in Northern Ireland – 1 in 12 will develop breast cancer before the age of 75.

Breast cancer can occur at any age. However, the risk of developing it increases with age, with most breast cancers occurring in women over 50. If it is found early, there is a good chance of successful recovery.

What is breast awareness?

Breast awareness means knowing your own breasts and being aware of what changes are normal for you.

How to be breast aware

You can become familiar with your breasts by looking and feeling them in any way that is best for you, eg in the bath, shower, or when dressing. Do this regularly, eg monthly. Medical professionals no longer recommend a set way to check your breasts. It is important to feel all parts of the breast including the nipple and in and around the armpit.

The normal breast

- Until you reach the menopause, breasts may feel different in the days before a period when the milk-producing tissue becomes active. At this time, some women's breasts may become larger or feel lumpy and tender, especially near the armpits.
- After a hysterectomy, breasts usually show the same monthly differences until the time when periods would have stopped.
- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may make breasts feel firmer and quite tender.
- After the menopause, activity in the milk-producing tissue stops. Breasts normally feel softer, less firm and not so lumpy.

Changes to look out for

Appearance

A change in size or outline of either breast, especially those caused by arm movement; any puckering or dimpling of the skin or veins that stand out more than usual.

Feelings

Pain or discomfort in one part of either breast or in your armpit, particularly if new and persistent.

Lumps

Any lumps or thickening in either breast that feels different from the other breast; any swelling or lumps under your armpit or around your collarbone.

Nipple change

A nipple that has become pulled in, changed shape or shows signs of any discharge, bleeding or rash.

What to do if you find a change

Most changes are harmless but all should be checked by a GP. If the change is due to cancer, earlier detection may mean simpler and more successful treatment. If you are aware of any change, see your GP without delay. He or she may decide to send you to a breast clinic for a more detailed examination.

Breast awareness 5 point code

1. Know what is normal for you
2. Know what changes to look and feel for
3. Look and feel
4. Report any changes to your GP immediately
5. Attend for breast screening from the age of 50

Breast screening

If you are aged between 50 and 70, you will be invited for breast screening every 3 years as part of the Northern Ireland breast screening programme. Your name will be obtained from a list supplied by your GP and you will be sent an invitation to come for a mammogram (breast x-ray).

If you are aged over 70, you will not automatically be invited for breast screening. However, you could still develop breast cancer as the risk increases with age – about a third of all breast cancers occur in women over the age of 70. You are therefore encouraged to make your own appointment for screening by contacting your local screening centre (see page 6).

At present, women under the age of 50 are not invited for breast screening because below this age:

- the risk of breast cancer is lower;
- women generally have denser breast tissue which makes their mammograms 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.

Screening centres

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

(also covering South Eastern HSC Trust)
The Screening Centre
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS
Tel: 028 9033 3700

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

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 Care Trust

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

Western Health and Social Care Trust

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

For further information on breast screening in Northern Ireland or for this leaflet in other languages or alternative formats, visit

www.cancerscreening.n-i.nhs.uk

or contact your local screening centre.



Health
Promotion
Agency



DHSSPS
Department of Health, Social Services
and Public Safety
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Designed and produced by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland and the Quality Assurance Reference Centre on behalf of the DHSSPS.

The logo for Breast Screening, with 'Breast' in a purple serif font and 'Screening' in a purple script font, separated by a stylized purple arrow pointing right.

Breast Screening

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page, featuring abstract, flowing shapes in shades of teal, blue, and green.

Breast awareness: looking out for changes