



# BreastCheck

Important information  
about your breast  
screening



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

  
**BreastCheck**  
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cioch  
The National Breast Screening Programme

## What is breast screening?

Breast screening involves taking a mammogram (x-ray) of your breasts, which is used to help find breast cancer when it is too small to see or feel.

When breast cancer is found early, it is easier to treat and there is a better chance of recovery.

## What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer occurs when normal breast cells begin to grow in an abnormal way.

- Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers among women in Ireland.
- Women of any age can get breast cancer but the risk increases as you get older.
- Research shows that women aged 50 and over are at a higher risk of getting breast cancer.
- If breast cancer is found early, it is likely to be easier to treat.

## What is BreastCheck?

BreastCheck – The National Breast Screening Programme which is part of the National Screening Service – is a health service funded by the Government. This means you do not have to pay.

The programme offers all women between the ages of 50 and 69 a breast cancer test (a mammogram) every two years. See page 4 for more about this test.

BreastCheck is available to women aged 50-69. Women in this age range benefit most from a breast screening programme. Women, regardless of age, should contact their GP (family doctor) with any concerns they have about their breast health.

## Does screening prevent breast cancer?

Screening does not prevent breast cancer. However, it helps to find breast cancer at an early stage.

A small number of cancers cannot be found by a mammogram, but if you go for regular screenings, any changes can be found as early as possible. At this stage, breast cancer is easier to treat and you have a higher chance of a good recovery.

Screening is for women who do not have symptoms of cancer. Speak with your GP (family doctor) as soon as possible if you have any concerns or symptoms. You might find it useful to refer to the section on changes to look and feel for on page 10 of this booklet.

## Where did BreastCheck get my details?

Under the Health (Provision of Information) Act, 1997, we have permission to get the names, addresses and dates of birth of eligible women from such bodies as the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Health, and private health insurance companies. Eligible women can also register themselves. BreastCheck keeps your details and health records safe and confidential. If you do not want to take part in BreastCheck, please write to us and we will not contact you again.

**BreastCheck encourages women to make sure they are on the register by contacting BreastCheck on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 or by checking online at [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie)**

## Keeping your details safe

The Health Service Executive (HSE) must comply with the Data Protection Acts 1988-2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). We respect your right to privacy and to the protection of your personal information. We may need to share your health records if it is necessary to support your care and treatment. BreastCheck will share your results with your GP unless otherwise advised.

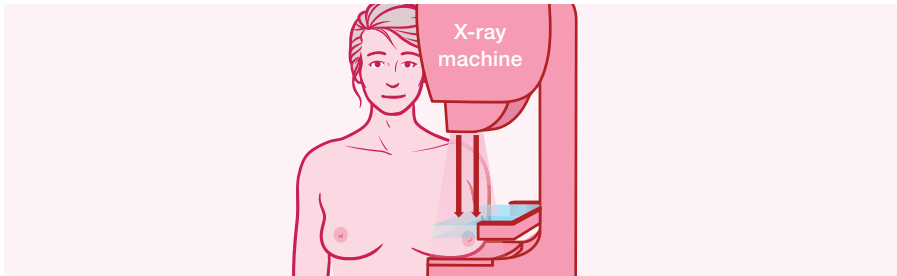
## What is a mammogram?

When you have a mammogram, a special x-ray machine is used to produce an image of your breasts. One at a time, your breasts are compressed between two flat plastic plates to take the x-ray. There has to be pressure to make sure that the mammogram is of a high quality.

This pressure spreads out the breast tissue so that we can see it more clearly. The mammography examination uses a very low dose of radiation and the benefit significantly outweighs the risk. In fact, the actual radiation dose is equivalent to approximately two months exposure to naturally occurring background radiation in Ireland.

## Does a mammogram hurt?

A mammogram may hurt. The procedure takes a few minutes and during this time pressure is applied to each breast. Some women find this uncomfortable or painful, but there is no evidence that the pressure harms the breasts.



If you find the procedure excessively painful, please tell the radiographer immediately and they will stop.

## Helpful hints

Wear a top with a skirt/trousers as it makes it easier to undress. Try to avoid using talcum powder or deodorant as this can show up on the mammogram.

## Where do I go for my BreastCheck appointment?

It depends on where you live. Your appointment could be in a BreastCheck unit beside a hospital or in a mobile screening unit.

## About your BreastCheck appointment

- Your screening appointment will take up to 30 minutes to complete. The mammogram itself will only take a few minutes. Screening might take longer if you have breast implants.
- If you've had a mammogram within the last 12 months we will not be able to do your screening mammogram. Please call your BreastCheck screening unit to rearrange your appointment.
- It is important to tell us if you need support to move around or have a disability. You may need extra time for your appointment. Our units are accessible for most types of wheelchair. You can call your screening unit if you have questions about access.
- We ask that you do not bring someone with you to your appointment unless you need extra help.
- We do not have toilet facilities in our mobile units. Toilets may not be available near our screening units.
- If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or a respiratory infection – including cough, fever or sore throat – please call us in advance and do not attend your screening appointment. Always follow public health advice.
- If this is your first BreastCheck appointment or you have changed your contact details since your last appointment, call our freephone number 1800 45 45 55 or your screening unit. We will check that we have up-to-date contact details for you.
- The number of your BreastCheck screening unit is on your appointment letter. You can call us if you have any questions about your appointment.

## What happens after the mammogram?

We aim to post you the results of your mammogram within three weeks. We will let you know if a follow-up visit is advisable. We will also send a copy of your results to your GP (family doctor).

Around one in every 25 women (4%) will be called back for more tests (assessment) after screening. Women who are recalled are often very anxious, so BreastCheck tries to keep the recall rates as low as possible.

Women who are found to have something abnormal on their mammogram will be recalled for more tests (assessment) and further evaluation. They may have a biopsy, which is when a sample of tissue is taken from the breast and tested to see if it is cancerous.

Surgery is offered as the first treatment for most types of breast cancer.

Most women called back for further testing do not have cancer, so around 99% of women who have been through the BreastCheck programme will get a normal result. We encourage them to continue attending screening appointments when invited.

## After your appointment

You may receive a text message inviting you to take part in the BreastCheck Patient Experience Survey. Learn more at [hse.ie/breastcheck](https://hse.ie/breastcheck)

## Benefits of breast screening

### Breast screening:

- saves lives
- can detect breast cancer early
- improves survival rates from breast cancer.

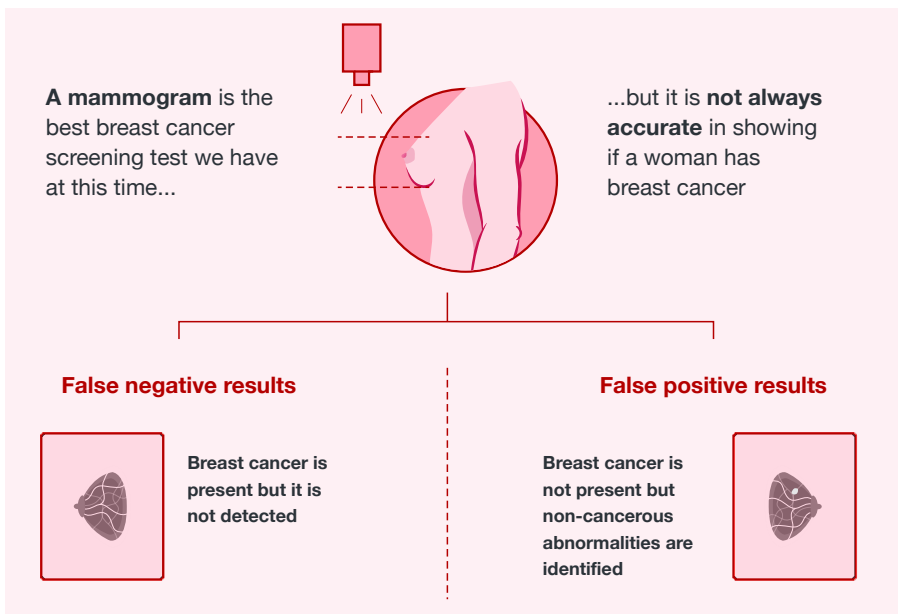
If breast cancer is found early through regular screening:

- it is easier to treat
- there may be more treatment options
- your chances of surviving it are greater.

## Limitations of breast screening

A radiologist cannot tell you with absolute confidence that they have detected all possible abnormalities.

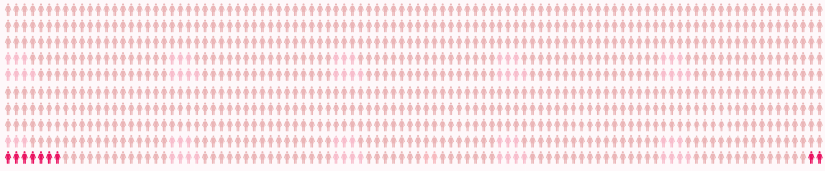
There will be cases when the examination will not identify an abnormality that could be cancerous. There will also be cases when abnormalities are identified that are harmless. This happens in all screening programmes that meet international best practice standards, including BreastCheck. For this reason, we advise you to remain vigilant and consult your GP if you have any concerns.



There is a small chance you will receive a negative mammogram result when cancer is present. This is known as a false negative result, and can happen in any screening programme.

Around two out of every 1,000 women screened will receive a false negative result. Around three in every 100 women screened will receive a false positive result.

On average, out of every **1,000** women screened for breast cancer



**7** will be diagnosed with cancer

**993** will receive a normal result.

For around **2** of these women, they will ultimately have a cancer that is not detected.

**Overdiagnosis** – Screening may lead to overdiagnosis. This is when issues are identified that are harmless, leading to unnecessary treatment and stress.

Sometimes breast cancers are visible but are at an early stage. It's not always possible to tell which cancers will become life-threatening.

For more on the benefits and limitations of breast screening, see [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie) or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.

## What is non-invasive cancer (DCIS)?

Non-invasive cancer is known as 'ductal carcinoma in situ', or DCIS for short. DCIS is an early form of breast cancer. It can also be described as pre-cancerous, pre-invasive or intraductal.

When you have DCIS, some of the milk ducts (channels in your breast that carry milk to the nipple) are cancerous. This means the cancer cells are inside the milk ducts ('in situ') and have not spread within or outside your breast.

To confirm a diagnosis of DCIS, you would need to have a biopsy, where a piece of breast tissue is taken from your breast for examination.



## Are there different types of DCIS?

Yes, they can be divided into high-, intermediate- and low-grade DCIS. This grading is based on what the cells look like under the microscope.

If DCIS is not treated, the cells may spread from the ducts into the surrounding breast tissue and become an invasive cancer (one that can spread to other parts of the body). Low-grade DCIS is less likely to become an invasive cancer than high-grade DCIS.

Not every woman with DCIS will develop invasive cancer, even if it is not treated. But it is impossible to tell which DCIS will develop into invasive cancer and which will not. As a result, some women will get treatment for a DCIS that would never have become an invasive cancer.

## What puts you at risk of breast cancer?

Research shows that the following factors can put you at risk of breast cancer:

- being a woman (men can get breast cancer, but it is rare)
- getting older
- having a history of breast cancer in your family
- your lifestyle, for example drinking too much alcohol, being overweight after menopause, or not exercising enough.

Even when you have been screened, you should stay breast aware and examine your breasts regularly for any changes.

## Be breast aware

No matter what age you are, it is important to always be breast aware.

- Know what is normal for your body.
- Know what changes you should look for.

## What changes should I look and feel for?

- any lumps or unusual thickening in your breast
- dimpling, puckering or redness of the skin
- a nipple that appears to be pulled-in or flattened
- a rash or flaky or crusted skin around the nipple
- a change in the size or shape of your breast
- swelling in your armpit or around your collarbone.

**Important: There are many reasons for changes in your breast.**

**Most of them are harmless, but you should get any change checked. If you have any concerns or notice any changes, please visit your GP (family doctor) without delay, even if you have had a recent mammogram.**

## It's good to talk

If you have any questions, you could find it helpful to talk about BreastCheck with your family and friends – particularly someone who has already used the service. You can also phone us free of charge on 1800 45 45 55.

## Communicating with you

We will communicate with you in an open, honest, timely and transparent manner if:

- something goes wrong with your care
- you experience harm as a result of your care
- we think that harm may have occurred.

This means that we will keep you fully informed of the facts and details about your involvement in the Breast Screening Programme.

## Giving your consent

When you attend for a breast screening mammogram we will ask you to give your consent by signing a form before the test. If you cannot sign the form, you will be asked to give your consent either verbally or by making a mark on the form in front of a radiographer. This consent can be withdrawn at any time, even after the mammogram has started.

The signed form confirms that you:

- have been told about breast screening, its benefits and its limitations
- understand this information
- have checked that your name, address and other details are correct, so that we can continue to communicate with you
- allow us to receive, hold and exchange your personal information and screening history with those who deliver the programme, your GP, and the National Cancer Registry of Ireland.

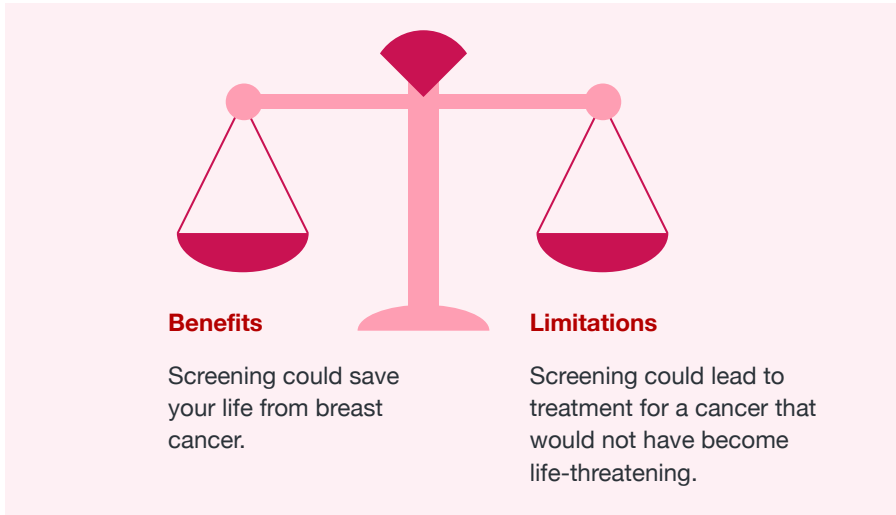
**Remember: Only you can give your consent to be part of our programme. You can withdraw your consent at any time by contacting us by emailing [info@breastcheck.ie](mailto:info@breastcheck.ie) or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.**

**If you withdraw consent, we will not contact you about the breast screening programme in the future.**

## Screening? It is your decision

It is your choice whether or not to have a BreastCheck screening. You have the right to accept or decline the invitation from BreastCheck. You may also accept an invitation to screening, but later change your mind.

All screening aims to find a balance between potential benefits and potential limitations. You must decide where that balance falls for you.



## Screening review

If you are diagnosed with breast cancer within two years of a normal BreastCheck mammogram or assessment result (an interval cancer) you can ask for a review. Contact [review.request@screeningservice.ie](mailto:review.request@screeningservice.ie) or National Screening Service, King's Inns House, 200 Parnell St, Freepost FDN7612, Dublin 1, D01A3Y8.

## More information

For more information, to register or to check if you are on the register, visit [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie) or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.

### **Central Office**

King's Inns House,  
200 Parnell Street, Dublin 1  
Tel: 01 865 9300  
Freephone: 1800 45 45 55  
Email: info@breastcheck.ie

### **Eccles Unit**

36 Eccles Street, Dublin 7  
Tel: 01 882 6200  
Email: eccles@breastcheck.ie

### **Merrion Unit**

Merrion Road, Dublin 4  
Tel: 01 223 5800  
Email: merrion@breastcheck.ie

### **Southern Unit**

Infirmery Road, Cork  
Tel: 021 464 9700  
Email: southern@breastcheck.ie

### **Western Unit**

Newcastle Road, Galway  
Tel: 091 580 600  
Email: western@breastcheck.ie

### **More information**

For more information, to register or to check if you are on the register, visit [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie) or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.

**Your notes**

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