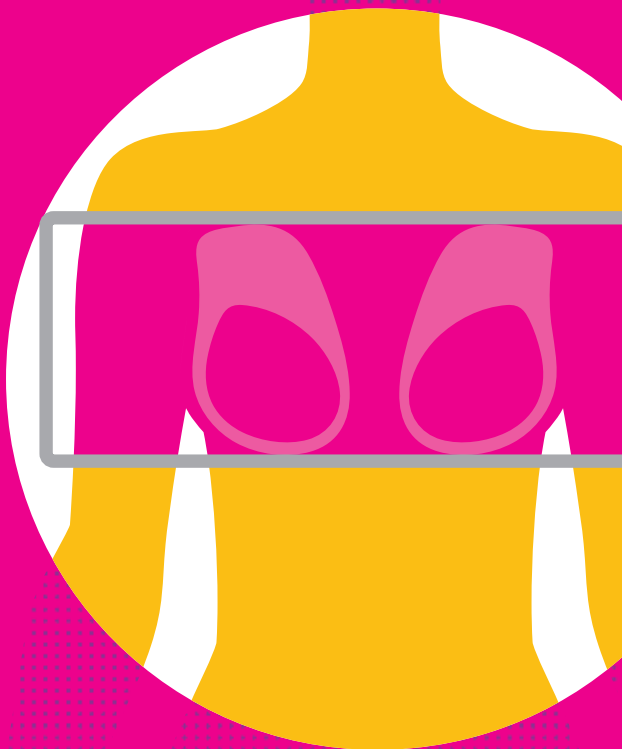


Breast Cancer

What you should know

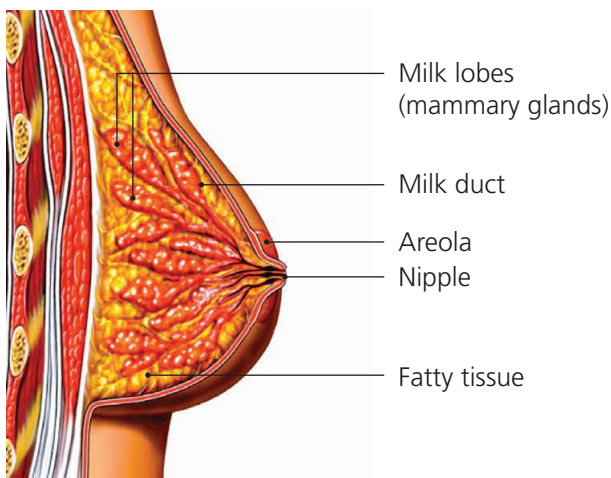


What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is when the normal cells in your breast grow in an abnormal way to form a lump called a tumour.

Your breasts are made up of different types of tissue including fat, connective tissue and gland tissue. The gland tissue is divided into milk lobes and milk ducts. The lobes make and store breast milk after pregnancy and the ducts carry milk to the nipple.

Your breasts are rarely the same size as each other. They may feel different at different times of your menstrual cycle, sometimes becoming lumpy just before your period.



What increases my risk of breast cancer?

Risk factors increase your chance of getting breast cancer. This leaflet outlines the things that we can change (like our weight, how much alcohol we drink and if we exercise) and the things we can't change (like our age and genetics). Having a risk factor doesn't mean you will get breast cancer. Sometimes people with no risk factors may get the disease.

Things we can change



Alcohol

Drinking alcohol increases your risk of breast cancer. Alcohol causes approximately 1 in 13 breast cancers diagnosed in Ireland each year. You can reduce your risk by not drinking alcohol. The less you drink the lower your risk.



Weight

Staying a healthy weight decreases your risk of breast cancer. If you are overweight, even modest sustained weight loss can lower your breast cancer risk.



Physical activity

Women who are physically active have a lower risk of breast cancer. Any amount of physical activity is good for your health. Try to do at least 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity a week. Moderate activity makes you a little warm and out of breath, increases your heart rate, and you can talk but not sing. Vigorous activity raises your heart rate and makes you sweat and feel out of breath.



Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding decreases your risk of breast cancer. The longer a woman breastfeeds over the course of her life, the more she reduces her breast cancer risk.



Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is a hormonal drug that is used to help manage the symptoms of menopause. Some types of HRT may increase the risk of breast cancer, but the increased risk is small and the benefits may outweigh the risks. Talk to your GP (family doctor) about your options.



Oral contraceptive pill

The oral contraceptive pill (OCP) can increase your risk of breast cancer. Each person's risk will be different. Talk to your GP about what is right for you.



Eating habits

A balanced, healthy diet can help you to maintain a healthy body weight, which decreases the risk of cancer.



Smoking

While it is not clear if smoking tobacco increases breast cancer risk, we do know that smoking increases the risk of at least 15 other types of cancer. Quitting tobacco products reduces cancer risk.

Things we can't change



Age

Your risk of breast cancer increases as you grow older. Breast cancer is most common in women over 50 years of age, but it can happen in younger women too.



Family history and inherited genes

Your risk of breast cancer is increased if a close member of your family (such as a mother, sister or daughter) had it, especially if they were under the age of 50 or if more than one close relative was affected.

If you have a strong family history of breast cancer, there might be a faulty gene in your family that increases your risk of breast cancer. For example, a faulty BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene. Inherited faulty genes only cause about 5-10 in every 100 breast cancers.



Dense breast tissue

If your breasts have more non-fatty (dense) tissue, your risk of breast cancer is higher than for a woman with less dense breasts. You can't tell your breast density by feeling or looking at your breasts. There is a lot that we don't yet understand about the link between breast density and breast cancer. Researchers are working to try and answer these questions.



Age when periods started and stopped

Your risk is higher if you started your periods early (before the age of 12) or had a late menopause (after the age of 55).



Children

Having no children or having your first child later in life (after age 30) slightly increases your risk.



Previous breast disease

Being diagnosed with breast cancer or atypical ductal hyperplasia (ADH) increases your risk of developing breast cancer in the future.

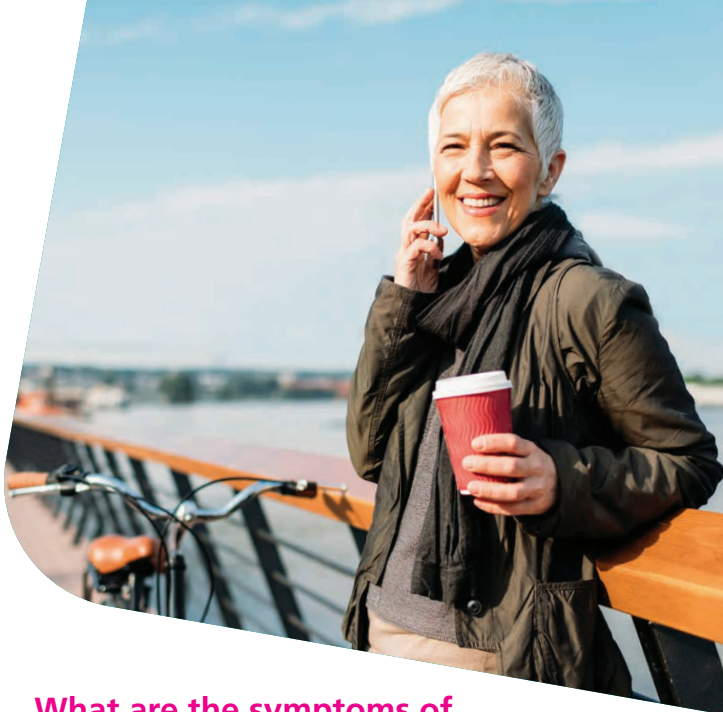


Radiotherapy

Having had radiotherapy to your chest area in the past increases your risk.

See the end of this leaflet for tips on how to reduce your risk of cancer in general.





What are the symptoms of breast cancer?

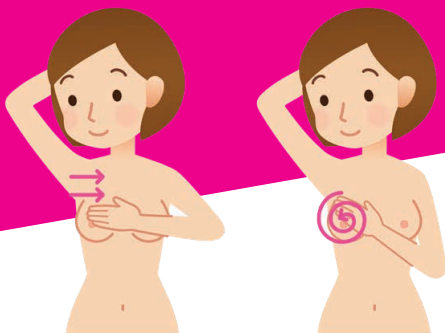
- A lump or thickening in your breast or armpit.
- A change in the size or shape of one breast.
- A change in the skin of your breast, like puckering or dimpling (the skin may look like orange peel).
- A breast abscess (infected boil) – this may appear as a red, tender area on your breast.
- A change in your nipple, like a pulled-in, sunken or flattened nipple.
- An unusual discharge (liquid) from one or both of your nipples – the discharge may be blood-stained or watery.
- A change on or around the nipple, such as a rash or flaky or crusted skin.
- Swelling in your armpit or around your collarbone.

Breast pain alone is not usually a sign of breast cancer.

These symptoms can be caused by other things, but always get them checked by your GP (family doctor).

How can I check myself?

- 1 Get to know what's normal for you – how your breasts look and feel.
- 2 Know what to look out for, like lumps or other changes to the look and feel of your breast or nipple. See the list in this leaflet.
- 3 Look for changes in the mirror and feel for changes, too. You could do this when you are in the shower, when putting on moisturiser or when lying down.
- 4 Check all parts of your breast, your armpits and up to your collar bone.
- 5 Discuss any changes with your GP – without delay.



Check your breasts regularly

You have a better chance of cure and recovery if breast cancer is diagnosed early, before it has grown bigger or spread to other parts of the body. Learn what looks and feels normal for you and check your breasts every month. Talk to your GP if you notice anything unusual.

Can I be screened for breast cancer?

Testing for cancer when you have no symptoms is called screening.

BreastCheck is the national breast screening programme. All women aged 50 to 69 are invited to have a free mammogram (breast X-ray) every 2 years.

For more information see www.breastcheck.ie

What should I do if I have any symptoms?

Breast cancer can happen at any age and at any time. Always get any symptoms checked by your GP without delay – even if you recently had a screening test or are due one soon or even if you are outside the age range for screening. The chances are it will not be cancer. Getting your symptoms checked is not wasting anyone's time.

How is breast cancer diagnosed?

If your doctor thinks your symptoms need to be looked at, you will have more tests. Tests that can help to diagnose breast cancer include:



Mammogram

An X-ray of your breasts.



Ultrasound scan

A scan to see if there are lumps in your breast.



Biopsy

A specialist takes tissue samples from your breast and examines them under a microscope.



If you are diagnosed with breast cancer, you can find more information in our booklet.

12 ways to reduce your cancer risk



Do not smoke



Avoid second-hand smoke



Be a healthy weight



Be physically active in everyday life



Have a healthy diet



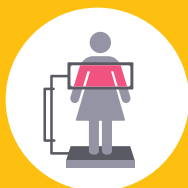
Avoid alcohol



Avoid too much sun



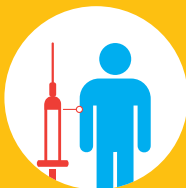
Avoid pollutants



Get screened for cancer



Breastfeed your baby / Talk to your doctor about HRT*



Get vaccinations - Hepatitis B for babies/HPV for older children



Find out if you are exposed to radon gas in your area. See www.radon.ie

Based on the European Code Against Cancer. The code was developed by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and the European Commission.
*Some types of HRT may increase the risk of some cancers. The benefits and risks vary from person to person.

Some facts about breast cancer

1/7

1 in 7 women in Ireland will get breast cancer at some point in their lives



Better treatments mean that more women are being cured or living with breast cancer



Men can also get breast cancer, but it is very rare

50+

Breast cancer is most common in women over 50



How common is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in Ireland, after skin cancer. Around 3,500 women and 35 men are diagnosed with it each year.

We use the term 'woman/women' in this leaflet but we understand that not everyone who has breasts identifies as a woman. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, we are here for you.

More information

If you are worried or have questions about breast cancer or any cancer:



Call our Support Line
Freephone 1800 200 700



Email supportline@irishcancer.ie
We will provide you with confidential advice, support and information.

Visit our Daffodil Centres, where our nurses can give you advice about healthy lifestyles and how you can reduce your risk of cancer. To find out where your local Daffodil Centre is, email daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie

Visit our website www.cancer.ie for more information on breast cancer and ways you can reduce your risk of cancer.

Want to stop smoking?

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer.

If you would like advice or support on quitting, call the HSE Quit Team on:

CallSave **1800 201 203**
Freetext **QUIT** to **50100**
or visit www.quit.ie



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