

How often should I have a mammogram?

All women over the age of 50 should have a mammogram every 2 years. If you are aged between 50 and 64 years and are eligible for BreastCheck, you will be called for a mammogram every 2 years. If you are over 64 years, you can be referred by your GP for a mammogram. Talk to your GP about what age you should have your first mammogram and how often.

Having a mammogram has its advantages and limitations. A mammogram cannot predict future breast changes or cancers. Very occasionally, breast cancer cannot be seen on a mammogram. Also, as with all X-rays, a low radiation dose is given off during the mammogram. However, the benefit of detecting a breast cancer at an early stage far outweighs these disadvantages. If you have any queries about having a mammogram please talk to your GP or call the National Breast Cancer Helpline on 1800 30 90 40.

Breast awareness

It is very important to be breast aware between mammograms. Women of **all** ages should be breast aware.

The 5 point breast awareness code

- 1 **Know what is normal for you**
- 2 **Know what changes to look for**
- 3 **Look and feel**
- 4 **Discuss any changes with your GP without delay**
- 5 **Attend for routine breast screening once aged 50 and over**

For further information, or to talk to a specialist nurse call the National Breast Cancer Helpline on 1800 30 90 40.

ABC – Action Breast Cancer

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, is the leading provider of breast cancer information and support in Ireland. Each year we reach over 25,000 women who are concerned about breast cancer or breast health. Our services are free and include:

- **National Breast Cancer Helpline**
1800 30 90 40 – staffed by specialist cancer nurses
- **Patient care programmes** – providing emotional support and practical assistance for those living with breast cancer
- **Health promotion** – providing community and workplace programmes on breast awareness and leading a healthy lifestyle
- **Advocacy** – providing a voice for those affected by breast cancer in Ireland
- **Professional support** – complementing the services offered by those caring for breast cancer patients
- **Research** – funding vital Irish research that will have a significant impact on the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

ABC is funded directly by donations from the public. If you would like to support our work by making a donation, please contact:

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For more information visit
www.cancer.ie/action

What is a mammogram?



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A mammogram is a special X-ray that looks at breast tissue. It can show even small changes that cannot be seen or felt by you or your GP. It can be used to screen women who have no breast changes, or to diagnose a problem. A radiographer will do the mammogram in the X-ray department of the hospital or on a mobile unit.

What happens when I go for a mammogram?

You will be asked to undress to the waist. Each breast is sandwiched between two plastic surfaces and pressure is applied to get the best possible X-ray image. You may find this uncomfortable, but it is only for a few seconds. X-rays are taken from top to bottom, and side-to-side, of each breast. The radiographer will then check the pictures. As soon as this is done, you can get dressed and go home. The test should take about 30 minutes. Depending on the clinic you attend, you can get your results the same day, or at the most, you will have them within 3 weeks.

Why would I need a mammogram?

- 1 You may have gone to your GP (family doctor) with a problem with your breast. He or she might have referred you to a specialist breast unit, which are located around the country, for further tests. For information on your nearest specialist breast unit, please call the National Breast Cancer Helpline on 1800 30 90 40.
- 2 You may be aged between 50 and 64 and eligible for BreastCheck, the National Breast Screening Programme. If this is the case, you should be on their register and an invitation will be sent to you in the post every 2 years with an appointment. If you are unsure whether you are on the register or not, you can call BreastCheck on 1800 45 45 55.

What can a mammogram show?

A mammogram can show cancer. However, the doctor may also find other common breast changes such as:

Calcifications: These are tiny flecks of calcium that cannot be felt and which look like grains of salt on the mammogram X-ray. These may be perfectly normal, but sometimes they are a sign of early breast cancer. Sometimes further tests may be required such as a biopsy. This is where a sample of breast tissue is removed and the cells are examined in the laboratory.

Cysts: These are swollen fluid-filled sacs in the breast. They are very common and are not related to cancer. If your doctor suspects a cyst, he or she should refer you to a specialist breast unit for further tests. It may be necessary to have the cyst drained by the doctor in the specialist breast unit. He or she will put a small needle into the cyst and remove the fluid inside it. This is called a fine needle aspirate (FNA) and is a very simple and quick procedure, which is mildly uncomfortable.

Fibroadenoma: These are solid, movable, round masses of breast tissue, which are common, especially in young women. Though not cancerous, they may grow in size or become painful and may need to be removed.

What if I am called back for further tests?

A small number of women are asked to return for further tests after having a mammogram. Try not to worry as this does not mean you have cancer. Sometimes a mammogram can show areas that are suspicious and need to be investigated further. Sometimes women are asked to return because the image on the X-ray is not clear enough.

Women who are called back for further tests usually go through what is called triple assessment. This includes a physical examination by a doctor, another mammogram and/or ultrasound and a biopsy. The majority of women called back do not turn out to have cancer.

National Breast Cancer Helpline 1800 30 90 40