

# Breast awareness

Breast cancer is the abnormal growth of cells lining the breast ducts or lobules. These abnormal cells grow and have the potential to spread to other parts of the body.

## Symptoms - Be breast aware

It is important for women of all ages to be breast aware. This means that you are familiar with the usual look and feel of your breasts so that you will be more likely to notice any unusual changes.

Your breasts are continually changing. The major stages of growth, development and change occur during puberty, pregnancy, breastfeeding and menopause. Getting older and changes in body weight can also affect the shape, size and feel of your breasts.

Breasts are often quite lumpy, and this can be normal for some women. Your breasts may feel more tender and lumpier just before your period.

Young women's breasts are usually dense and fibrous because there is more glandular tissue than fatty tissue. As we age, breasts become less glandular and increasingly fatty, making them softer and less lumpy.

### See a doctor immediately if you notice any unusual changes, including:

- A lump, lumpiness or thickening of the breast or armpit.
- Changes in the skin of a breast, such as puckering, dimpling or a rash
- Persistent or unusual breast pain
- Discharge from a nipple, a nipple rash, or a change in its shape
- A change in the shape or size of a breast
- An area that feels different to other parts of the breast.

You can also ask your doctor to examine your breasts as part of your health check-up.



Men need to also be aware of what is normal for them.

### See you doctor if you have any unusual changes such as:

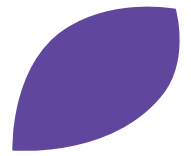
- A painless lump in the breast close to the nipple (the most common symptom)
- Discharge from the nipple
- A change in shape or appearance of the nipple or pectorals
- A change in shape or appearance of the breast, such as swelling or dimpling
- Painful or swollen lymph nodes (glands) under the arm.

## Breast Cancer Screening

Breast screening (mammographic screening or mammograms) can find cancers at an early stage when they are too small for you to notice or when you don't have any symptoms.

Mammographic screening every two years is recommended for women aged 50-74 years, but women from 40-49 or 75 and over should talk to their doctor to see if it is recommended for them. Regular mammograms can reduce your risk of developing late-stage breast cancer through early detection, particularly in women aged 50-69. Talk to your doctor about when is the best time for you to start screening.

BreastScreen Australia is a national mammography screening program available free of charge to women over the age of 40. Eligible women should be screened every two years at one of the 500 locations available nationwide. Breast screening through this program is for women who have not seen or felt any changes to their breasts. To make an appointment at your nearest BreastScreen Australia service, call 13 20 50. If you have noticed any breast changes, you should talk to your doctor. There may be other tests that are more appropriate for you.



## Risk Factors

The cause of breast cancer is largely unknown. It is unlikely that there is one single cause and there are probably a few factors which work together to trigger the growth of a cancer. There are a few factors which may increase your chance of developing breast cancer; however, everyone is at risk of developing the disease.

Apart from non-melanoma skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer found in Australian women. Although it can occur at any age, it is more common in women over 40.

### There are a number of risk factors for women, including:

- Personal factors
  - > older age; dense breast tissue as seen on a mammogram
- Lifestyle factors
  - > being overweight or gaining weight after menopause; drinking alcohol every day
  - > not being physically active
- Medical factors
  - > using menopause hormone therapy (MHT) that contains both oestrogen and progesteron
  - > taking the pill for an extended time
  - > taking diethylstilboestral (DES) during pregnancy
  - > having radiation therapy to the chest for Hodgkin lymphoma
  - > having atypical ductal hyperplasia or proliferative disease without atypia
  - > previous diagnosis of LCIS or DCIS
- Reproductive factors
  - > starting first period younger than 12
  - > being older than 30 at the birth of first child
  - > not giving birth
  - > not having breastfed
  - > going through menopause after 55
- Family history factors
  - > a family history of breast cancer and/or a particular type of ovarian cancer in first-degree relatives (e.g. mother, sister) on the same side of the family, especially if diagnosed at a young age.

Men can also be diagnosed with breast cancer, although it is rare. Around 1% of all breast cancers are diagnosed in men.

### The risk factors for men include:

- Personal factors
  - > older age
- Medical factors
  - > a rare genetic syndrome called Klinefelter syndrome. Males with this syndrome have three sex chromosomes (XXY) instead of the usual two (XY)
- Family history factors
  - > a family history with several first-degree relatives (male or female) who have had BRCA2 breast cancer
  - > a relative diagnosed with breast cancer under the age of 40
  - > several relatives with ovarian cancer or colon cancer
- Inheriting a mutation in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes.

Transgender and gender diverse people can also get breast cancer. A transgender woman who is taking medicines to boost female hormones and lower male hormones may have an increased risk of developing breast cancer. A transgender man who has had a mastectomy is still at risk of developing breast cancer. This is likely due to small amounts of breast tissue that may remain after surgery.