

Breast Screening Explained

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Breast Screening Explained

This leaflet tells you about free breast screening. Breast Test Wales is part of the NHS breast screening programme. It is your choice whether or not you have breast screening.

1 What is breast screening?

Breast screening looks for breast cancer before symptoms show. This involves taking mammograms, which are x-rays of the breast. At least two mammograms of each breast are taken. Screening cannot stop you from getting breast cancer, it can only find cancer if it is already there.

2 Why is it important?

Breast cancer affects one in nine women living in Wales. Each year, over 2,000 women living in Wales are diagnosed with breast cancer, and around 600 die of it.

If we find breast cancer at an early stage, treatment has the greatest chance of being successful.

Breast screening women aged 50-70 has been shown to reduce the risk of dying from breast cancer by around 35%. It is not yet known whether screening younger women who have a strong family history of breast cancer will reduce their risk of dying from breast cancer.

3 Does breast screening have any risks?

Screening might find cancer that would never have become life threatening. Doctors cannot always tell whether a breast cancer that is diagnosed will go on to be life threatening or not, so they offer treatment to all women with breast cancer.

Any x-ray involves radiation and can very rarely cause cancer, mammograms use a very low amount, about the same as a person receives when flying from Wales to Australia and back.

Breast screening does not find all kinds of cancer. You may be falsely reassured by a normal result and then think that this means there is no risk of developing breast cancer before your next screening test. Some cancers will be missed and some will develop between screening. If you notice any changes or have any concerns in between your screening appointments, you should see your GP straightaway rather than waiting for your next routine screening appointment.

Women with possible abnormalities on their mammograms are asked to come back for more checks, which can include x-rays, ultrasound and biopsy (taking samples of the breast tissue). Most of these women are found not to have cancer. These women experience

unnecessary worry and some feel distress which affects their ability to do their normal day-to-day activities.

4 How many breast cancers do you find?

We screen around 2,000 women per year through our Family History Programme. Most are fine, but around ten women (slightly less than one in every 200 women screened) will be found to have breast cancer.

5 Who do you screen?

Breast Test Wales sends out a screening appointment to all women referred through the local genetics department, once a consent form has been completed. If you don't think you should have been invited, please let us know straightaway.

Whatever age you are, if you are worried about any breast problem, please contact your doctor. They may refer you to the breast clinic of your local hospital.

6 Where do I go for breast screening?

We carry out breast screening at one of our screening centres. Your invitation letter tells you exactly where you need to go and how to change your appointment if you need to.

7 What should I wear?

It may be easier to wear a separate top as you will have to undress to the waist.

You can wear deodorant if you want as it will not affect the procedure.

8 What will happen?

When you arrive, we will check your personal details and take you to a private changing cubicle. From there, a female radiographer or mammography practitioner will take you to another room for your mammograms. She will explain everything to you and answer any questions that you have. She will then position your breasts, one at a time, onto the mammographic machine and lower the plastic plate onto it to flatten it. This helps keep your breasts still and get clear x-rays. The mammographer will usually take two x-rays of each breast-one from above and one from the side. You will need to keep still while the x-rays are taken.

9 Will the procedure hurt?

Some women find the procedure uncomfortable and a few may find it painful. We need to press your breasts between the two plates to produce good quality mammograms at a low radiation dose. The pressure will only last for a few seconds. If you do experience pain, it usually only lasts for as long as the procedure takes. In a very small number of women, it may last longer.

10 What happens next?

Our specialist staff will check your mammograms. We aim to send you your result by post within three weeks. We will also tell your GP and Genetics the result.

11 What does it mean if I am called back?

We may need to call you back because of a technical fault. We will tell you if this is the reason.

We call back about one in every 20 women that we screen because the mammogram results show that more tests are needed. These tests may include more mammograms, a clinical examination, an ultrasound scan and possibly a needle biopsy. Most women will not have any problems, or may have harmless breast abnormalities and we will call them back again as part of the screening process.

12 What if I need treatment?

If you are diagnosed with breast cancer, finding it early gives the best chance of successful treatment. The treatment is likely to include surgery (which may mean a mastectomy), hormone therapy, radiotherapy and possibly chemotherapy as well. These treatments can cause serious, long term side effects.

13 What happens to my x-rays once they have been checked?

We keep your mammograms securely for at least 8 years, so that we can do the following:

- Compare your latest mammograms with ones you have had before.
- Review all screening records, including mammograms.
- Train and increase the expertise of our specialist staff.
- Measure the quality of the service we provide.

Staff who work in other parts of the health service may need to see your records to help with your medical care. If a review shows that you should have been cared for differently, we will contact you. If you want us to, we will give you more information about your case.

For us to contact you as part of this programme, we will need to handle some of your personal information.

If you need more information about this, you can:

- visit the website publichealthwales.org/privacy;
- email PHW.InformationGovernance@wales.nhs.uk; or
- phone 02920 104307

14 How accurate is breast screening?

Mammograms are the best way of detecting breast cancer early but they are not perfect. For example:

- some cancers are very difficult to see;
- some cancers, even though they are there, cannot be seen at all; and
- the person reading the mammogram may miss the cancer. (This will happen occasionally, no matter how experienced the reader is). We aim to have two specialists check all the mammograms.

More information and references are on our website

15 What happens if...?

I have not accepted previous invitations, can I still come?

Yes, we would like you to come even if you have not been before.

I have had mammograms elsewhere?

You may still come, as long as it was more than six months ago. If it was more recent, please contact us.

I have a disability?

Please contact us.

I have implants, or breast fillers, can I still go for screening?

Yes, but the implant or filler is dense and will hide some of your breast tissue and there is a greater chance that if

you have breast cancer it may not be seen on an x-ray.

If you have breast implants or breast fillers it is particularly important that you continue to look out for any changes in your breasts following your breast screening. Please contact your family doctor if you find anything unusual.

I need to claim travel expenses?

If you are on Income Support, you can claim your expenses back. Please ask us for a form.

I need an interpreter?

We can normally arrange the help of an interpreter. Please let us know at least a week before you come.

I would like to know about the radiation dose?

Mammograms use a tiny amount of radiation, and the risk to your health from this is very small. If you are worried about the examination or have any questions, please ask the radiographer.

16 The facts

To help you decide whether or not to come for breast screening, we have listed the main benefits and drawbacks of screening for breast cancer below.

- Breast screening reduces the risk of dying from breast cancer.

- Screening will miss some breast cancers.
- Most breast cancers found at screening are at an early stage when there is a good chance of successful treatment.
- We cannot cure all breast cancers found at screening.
- We call women back for more tests if we are not sure about what their mammograms show. If you are called back, it can be worrying. However, we find that many of these women do not have cancer.
- We find around 850 cases of cancer each year, including around ten from women in the family history programme.
- Some women find mammograms uncomfortable or painful, but normally just for a brief time.

17 More information and support

If you have any questions about the service you should do one of the following.

- Contact your local Breast Test Wales screening centre.
- Ask your local genetics department.
- Visit the following websites.
www.breasttestwales.wales.nhs.uk
www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk
www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

If you would like to comment on our service please visit

<http://www.breasttestwales.wales.nhs.uk/feedback/>

We can provide this information in other languages, in large print, on audio tape or in Braille.

18 Information on Breast Test Wales locations

If you want to change your appointment time, please contact your Breast Test Wales screening centre.

South East Wales

Breast Test Wales, 18 Cathedral Road,
Cardiff, CF11 9LJ

Phone: 029 2039 7222

Minicom: 029 2078 7907

West Wales

Breast Test Wales, 24 Alexandra Road,
Swansea, SA1 5DY

Phone: 01792 459988

Minicom: 01792 453110

North Wales

Breast Test Wales, Maes Du Road,
Llandudno, LL30 1QY

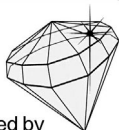
Phone: 01492 860888

Minicom: 01492 863503

We welcome correspondence and phone calls in Welsh.

We will respond to correspondence in Welsh without delay.

**Crystal
Mark
17879**



Clarity approved by
Plain English Campaign

