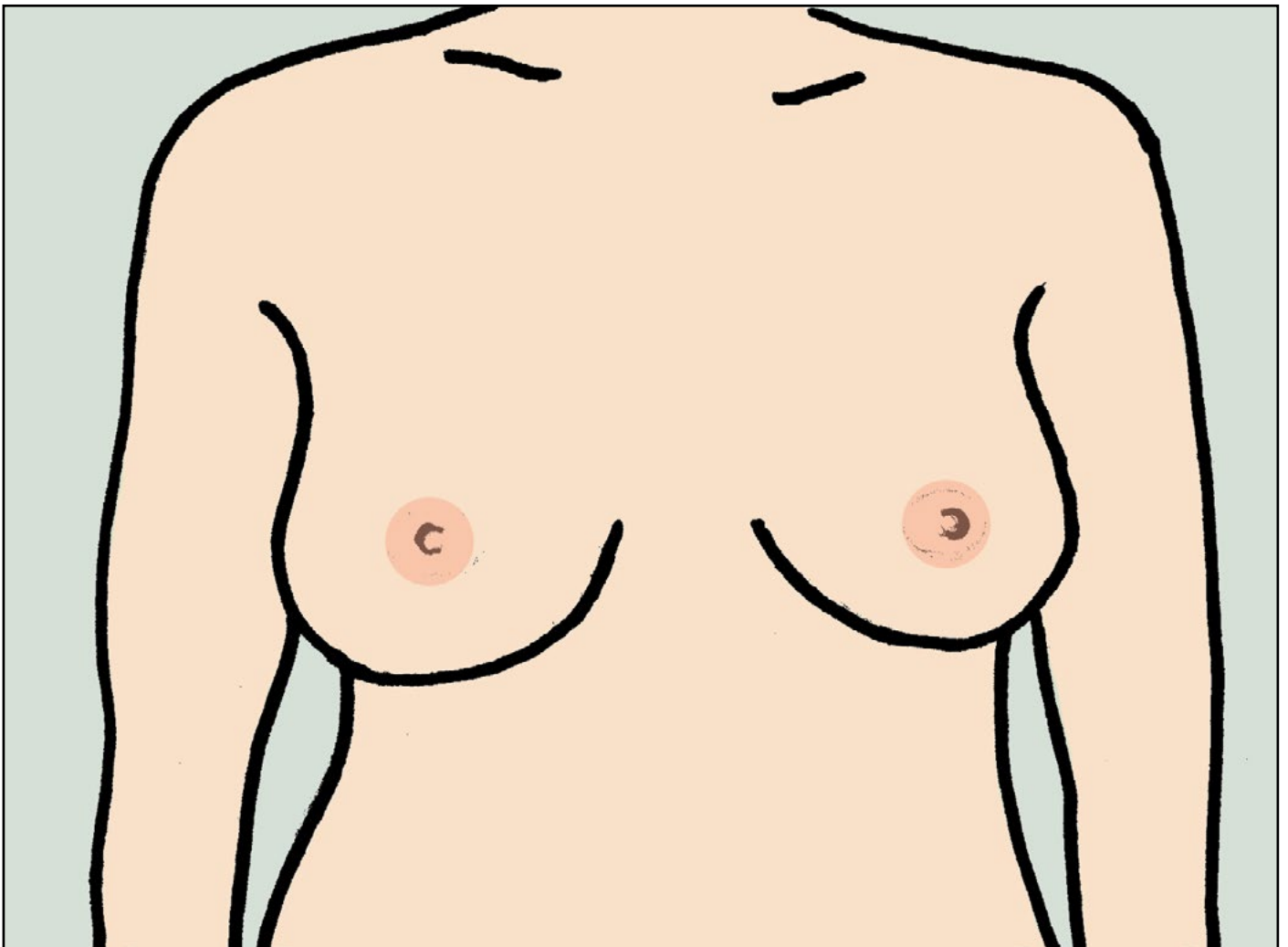


# Breast cancer screening

An easy read guide about a health test for women aged 50 and over



# Contents: what is in this booklet

Page



Breast screening

3



Breast cancer

4



Your choice

5



About the test

7



On the day of the test

8



Test results

10



Check your breasts

11



More information

12

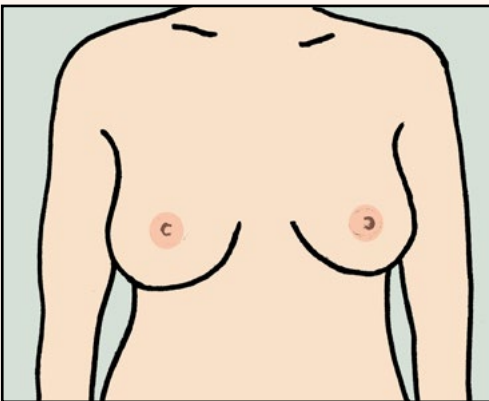


## Breast screening



This booklet tells you about breast screening. Breast screening is for women aged 50 and older.

This is a free NHS test you can have to check your breasts (boobs).



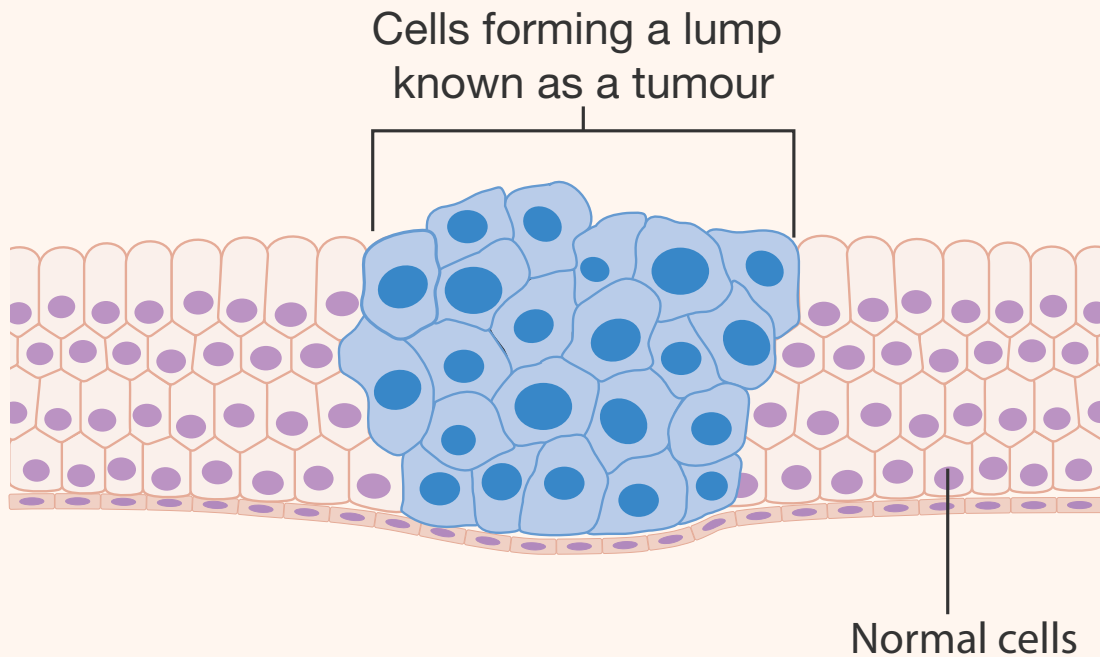
The test checks if your breasts are healthy.

The test can find changes inside your breasts that are too small to see or feel.

These small changes can grow and become cancer.



# Breast cancer



Cancer is a very serious illness that you can die from.

Breast cancer starts when cells in the breast begin to grow and get bigger in size. This forms a lump known as a tumour.

Cancer can spread to other parts of the body too.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the country.



1 in 7 women get breast cancer.



Your risk of getting breast cancer increases as you get older.

Most breast cancers are found in women aged over 50.

More women now survive breast cancer than in the past.



## Your choice



You can choose if you want to have breast screening or not.

There are good points and bad points about breast screening.



### Good points

Breast screening is a way of finding breast cancer. It can help find cancers that are too small to see or feel.

Breast screening can save lives. It means more women can have treatment to deal with breast cancer.



### Bad points

Screening can mean some women have extra tests and treatment that they may not have needed.

Screening will find most breast cancers but may miss one on rare occasions.



You can talk to someone you feel comfortable with to help you think about the test.

You can talk to a nurse, carer, relative, support worker or your doctor.

You can arrange a visit to your local breast screening unit before the test.



## About the test



If you are a woman aged from 50 up to your 71st birthday we will invite you for breast screening every 3 years.

We will send you a letter.



If you need any extra help, or you are in a wheelchair, then you can ask for a special appointment.



If you are aged 71 or over you can still have breast screening every 3 years if you ask your local breast screening service.



## On the day of the test



If you decide you want to go for breast screening you will need to go to a breast screening unit.



You will have images taken of your breasts. These images are called mammograms.



When you arrive at the breast screening unit the staff will check your full name, address and date of birth.

They will explain what will happen and answer any questions you have.



You will need to take off the clothes you are wearing above your waist. This includes your bra, if you wear one.

It may be easier to wear a skirt or trousers instead of a dress.





The person doing the test is called a mammographer. This will always be a woman.

She will place your breasts on to the machine one at a time.



The machine will flatten your breast and hold it in place.

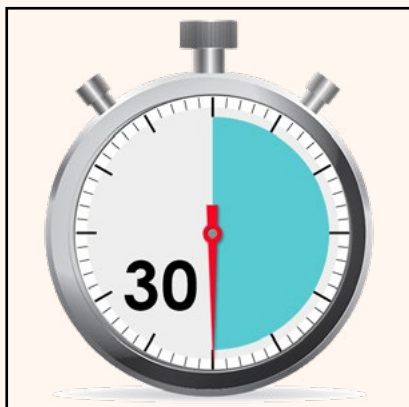
You will feel your breast being squeezed.



The x-ray machine may hurt a little bit but this will only be for a few seconds.

You need to keep very still for a few seconds while the images are taken.

We will usually take 2 images of each breast.



The screening test only takes a few minutes.

You will be at the screening centre for about 30 minutes.



## Test results



We will send you a letter within 2 weeks with your screening test results.



Most results are normal.

This means you don't get asked to go for screening again for 3 years.



A few women will be asked to go back to the breast screening unit for more checks.

If these extra checks show that you might have cancer, someone will talk to you about what will happen next.



They will answer any questions you have.



## Check your breasts

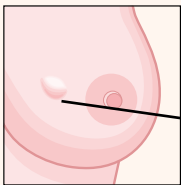
If you know how your breasts usually look and feel you are more likely to spot changes that could be a sign of cancer.

**Touch** your breasts. Can you feel anything unusual?

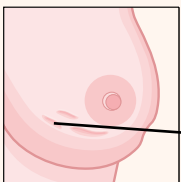
**Look** for changes. Is there any change in the shape of your breasts or how they look?

**Check** anything unusual with your doctor

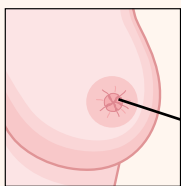
It is important to look out for the following:



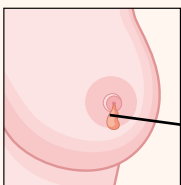
Lump – you may be able to feel a lump but not see it



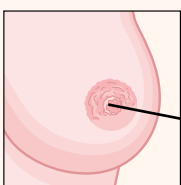
A change in the look and feel of the skin – this can be a bit like orange peel



A change in the appearance or direction of a nipple



Discharge (liquid) from one or both of your nipples



Redness or rash on the skin or around the nipple

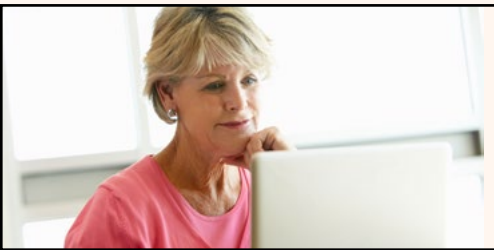


## More information



You can phone your local breast screening centre using the number on the appointment letter we sent you.

A carer, relative or friend can phone for you.



You can visit the NHS.UK website at [www.nhs.uk/breast](http://www.nhs.uk/breast).



You can contact your local breast screening centre. See [www.nhs.uk/breastscreening](http://www.nhs.uk/breastscreening) for their contact details.

You can also talk to your own doctor.

First published: February 2018 This version: February 2025

©NHS England 2025

Images courtesy of:

- The LNR Breast Screening Group on behalf of the East Midlands Breast Screening Group with support from Bill Newsinger and People with Learning Disabilities in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland (pages 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12)
  - Photosymbols (pages 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 and 12)
  - Cancer Research UK (page 4)
  - Shutterstock: Pathdoc (page 5), michaeljung (page 7), Monkey Business Images (page 12)
- TLC information (page 11) reproduced with permission from Breast Cancer Now

