



# BreastCheck

Important information  
about your breast  
screening



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála  
National Screening Service

  
**BreastCheck**  
An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Cioch  
The National Breast Screening Programme

## What is breast screening?

Breast screening involves taking a mammogram (x-ray) of your breasts, which is used to help find breast cancer when it is too small to see or feel.

When breast cancer is found early, it is easier to treat and there is a better chance of recovery.

## What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer occurs when normal breast cells begin to grow in an abnormal way.

- Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers among women in Ireland.
- Women of any age can get breast cancer but the risk increases as you get older.
- Research shows that women aged 50 and over are at a higher risk of getting breast cancer.
- If breast cancer is found early, it is likely to be easier to treat.

## What is BreastCheck?

BreastCheck – The National Breast Screening Programme which is part of the National Screening Service – is a health service funded by the Government. This means you do not have to pay.

The programme offers all women between the ages of 50 and 68 a breast cancer test (a mammogram) every two years. See page 4 for more about this test.

BreastCheck is expanding and by the end of 2021 will be available to women aged 50-69. Women in this age range benefit most from a breast screening programme. Women, regardless of age, should contact their GP (family doctor) with any concerns they have about their breast health.

## Does screening prevent breast cancer?

Screening does not prevent breast cancer. However, it helps to find breast cancer at an early stage.

A small number of cancers cannot be found by a mammogram, but if you go for regular screenings, any changes can be found as early as possible. At this stage, breast cancer is easier to treat and you have a higher chance of a good recovery.

Screening is for women who do not have symptoms of cancer. Speak with your GP (family doctor) as soon as possible if you have any concerns or symptoms. You might find it useful to refer to the section on changes to look and feel for on page 10 of this booklet.

## Where did BreastCheck get my details?

BreastCheck puts together a register (list) of women eligible for screening from details supplied by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the medical card scheme and private health insurers. Eligible women also register themselves. BreastCheck keeps your details and health records safe and confidential. If you do not want to take part in BreastCheck, please write to us and we will not contact you again.

**BreastCheck encourages women to make sure they are on the register by contacting BreastCheck on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 or by checking online at [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie).**

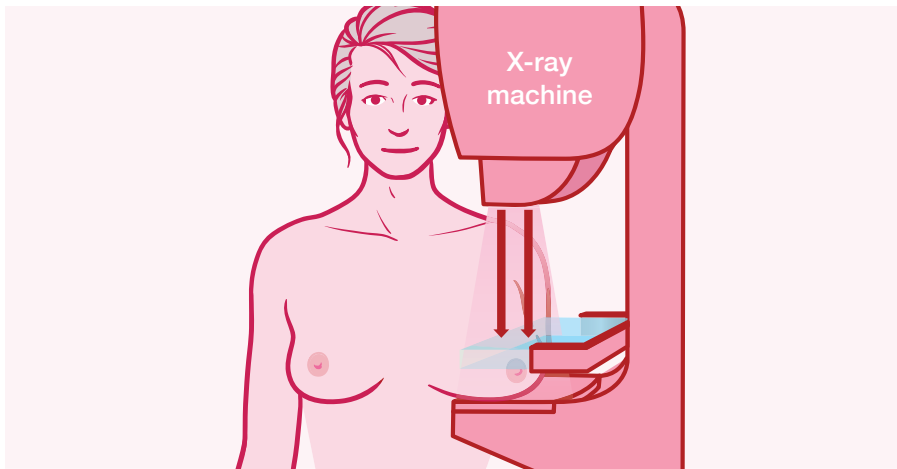
## What is a mammogram?

When you have a mammogram, a special x-ray machine is used to produce an image of your breasts. One at a time, your breasts are compressed between two flat plastic plates to take the x-ray. There has to be pressure to make sure that the mammogram is of a high quality.

This pressure spreads out the breast tissue so that we can see it more clearly. The dose of radiation used is very small and is within recommended limits, so the risk to your health is very low.

## Does a mammogram hurt?

A mammogram may hurt. The procedure takes a few minutes and during this time pressure is applied to each breast. Some women find this uncomfortable or painful, but there is no evidence that the pressure harms the breasts.



If you find the procedure excessively painful, please tell the radiographer immediately and they will stop.

## Where do I go for my BreastCheck appointment?

It depends on where you live. Your appointment could be in a BreastCheck unit beside a hospital or in a mobile screening unit.

## About your BreastCheck appointment

- Your visit will take about 30 minutes in total.
- Your mammogram will only take a few minutes.
- You might need a longer screening appointment if you have breast implants.
- You might need a longer appointment if you have sensory, intellectual or mobility requirements. If so, please let us know in advance using the contact number on your appointment letter.
- All BreastCheck screening units are accessible to people with disabilities, and are accessible for most types of wheelchair. If you have any questions, please call the BreastCheck unit number that is on your appointment letter.

## What happens after the mammogram?

We aim to post you the results of your mammogram within three weeks. We will let you know if a follow-up visit is advisable. We will also send a copy of your results to your GP (family doctor).

Around one in every 25 women (4%) will be called back for more tests (assessment) after screening. Women who are recalled are often very anxious, so BreastCheck tries to keep the recall rates as low as possible.

Women who are found to have something abnormal on their mammogram will be recalled for more tests (assessment) and further evaluation. They may have a biopsy, which is when a sample of tissue is taken from the breast and tested to see if it is cancerous.

Surgery is offered as the first treatment for most types of breast cancer.

Most women called back for further testing do not have cancer, so around 99% of women who have been through the BreastCheck programme will get a normal result. We encourage them to continue attending screening appointments when invited.

## Benefits of breast screening

### Breast screening:

- saves lives
- can detect breast cancer early
- improves survival rates from breast cancer.

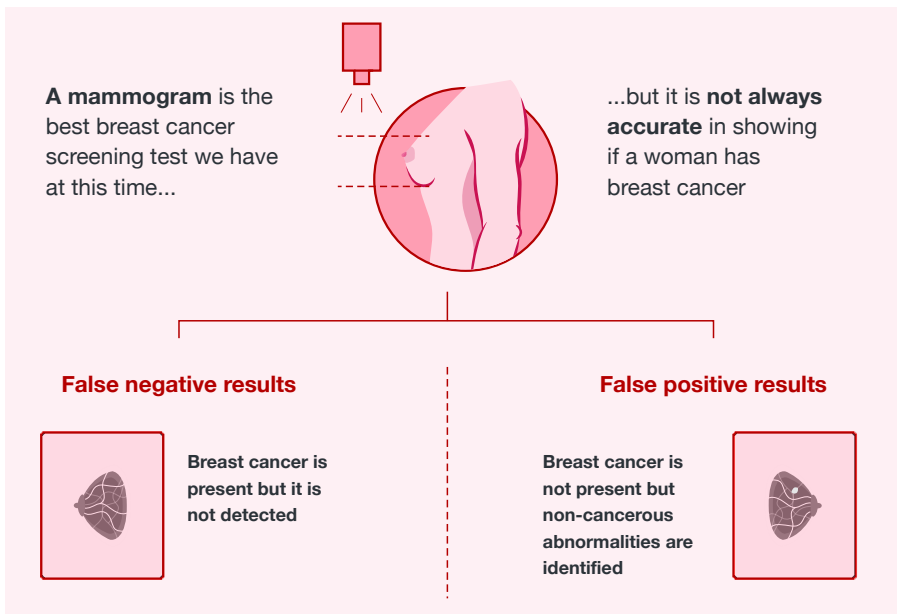
If breast cancer is found early through regular screening:

- it is easier to treat
- there may be more treatment options
- your chances of surviving it are greater.

## Limitations of breast screening

A radiologist cannot tell you with absolute confidence that they have detected all possible abnormalities.

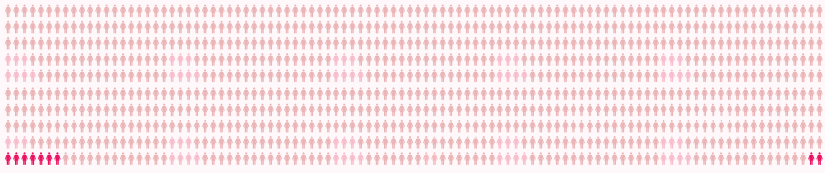
There will be cases when the examination will not identify an abnormality that could be cancerous. There will also be cases when abnormalities are identified that are harmless. This happens in all screening programmes that meet international best practice standards, including BreastCheck. For this reason, we advise you to remain vigilant and consult your GP if you have any concerns.



**Missed diagnosis** – There is a small chance you will receive a negative (all clear) mammogram result when cancer is present. This is known as a false negative result, and can happen in any screening programme.

Around two out of every 1,000 women screened will receive a false negative result. Around three in every 100 women screened will receive a false positive result.

On average, out of every **1,000** women screened for breast cancer



**7** will be diagnosed with cancer

**993** will receive a normal result.

For around **2** of these women, they will ultimately have a cancer that is not detected.

**Overdiagnosis** – Screening may lead to overdiagnosis. This is when issues are identified that are harmless, leading to unnecessary treatment and stress.

Sometimes breast cancers are visible but are at an early stage. It's not always possible to tell which cancers will become life-threatening.

For more on the benefits and limitations of breast screening, see [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie) or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.

## What is non-invasive cancer (DCIS)?

Non-invasive cancer is known as 'ductal carcinoma in situ', or DCIS for short. DCIS is an early form of breast cancer. It can also be described as pre-cancerous, pre-invasive or intraductal.

When you have DCIS, some of the milk ducts (channels in your breast that carry milk to the nipple) are cancerous. This means the cancer cells are inside the milk ducts ('in situ') and have not spread within or outside your breast.

To confirm a diagnosis of DCIS, you would need to have a biopsy, where a piece of breast tissue is taken from your breast for examination.



## Are there different types of DCIS?

Yes, they can be divided into high-, intermediate- and low-grade DCIS. This grading is based on what the cells look like under the microscope.

If DCIS is not treated, the cells may spread from the ducts into the surrounding breast tissue and become an invasive cancer (one that can spread to other parts of the body). Low-grade DCIS is less likely to become an invasive cancer than high-grade DCIS.

Not every woman with DCIS will develop invasive cancer, even if it is not treated. But it is impossible to tell which DCIS will develop into invasive cancer and which will not. As a result, some women will get treatment for a DCIS that would never have become an invasive cancer.

## What puts you at risk of breast cancer?

Research shows that the following factors can put you at risk of breast cancer:

- being a woman (men can get breast cancer, but it is rare)
- getting older
- having a history of breast cancer in your family
- your lifestyle, for example drinking too much alcohol, being overweight after menopause, or not exercising enough.

Even when you have been screened, you should stay breast aware and examine your breasts regularly for any changes.

## Be breast aware

No matter what age you are, it is important to always be breast aware.

- Know what is normal for your body.
- Know what changes you should look for.

## What changes should I look and feel for?

- any lumps or unusual thickening in your breast
- dimpling, puckering or redness of the skin
- a nipple that appears to be pulled-in or flattened
- a rash or flaky or crusted skin around the nipple
- a change in the size or shape of your breast
- swelling in your armpit or around your collarbone.

**Important: There are many reasons for changes in your breast. Most of them are harmless, but you should get any change checked. If you have any concerns or notice any changes, please visit your GP (family doctor) without delay, even if you have had a recent mammogram.**

## It's good to talk

If you have any questions, you could find it helpful to talk about BreastCheck with your family and friends – particularly someone who has already used the service. You can also phone us free of charge on 1800 45 45 55.

## Communicating with you

We will communicate with you in an open, honest, timely and transparent manner if:

- something goes wrong with your care
- you experience harm as a result of your care
- we think that harm may have occurred.

This means that we will keep you fully informed of the facts and details about your involvement in the Breast Screening Programme.

## Giving your consent

When you first attend for a breast screening mammogram we will ask you to give your consent by signing a form before the test. If you cannot sign the form, you will be asked to give your consent either verbally or by making a mark on the form in front of a radiographer. This consent can be withdrawn at any time, even after the mammogram has started.

The signed form confirms that you:

- have been told about breast screening, its benefits and its limitations
- understand this information
- have checked that your name, address and other details are correct, so that we can continue to communicate with you
- allow us to receive, hold and exchange your personal information and screening history with those who deliver the programme, your GP, and the National Cancer Registry of Ireland.

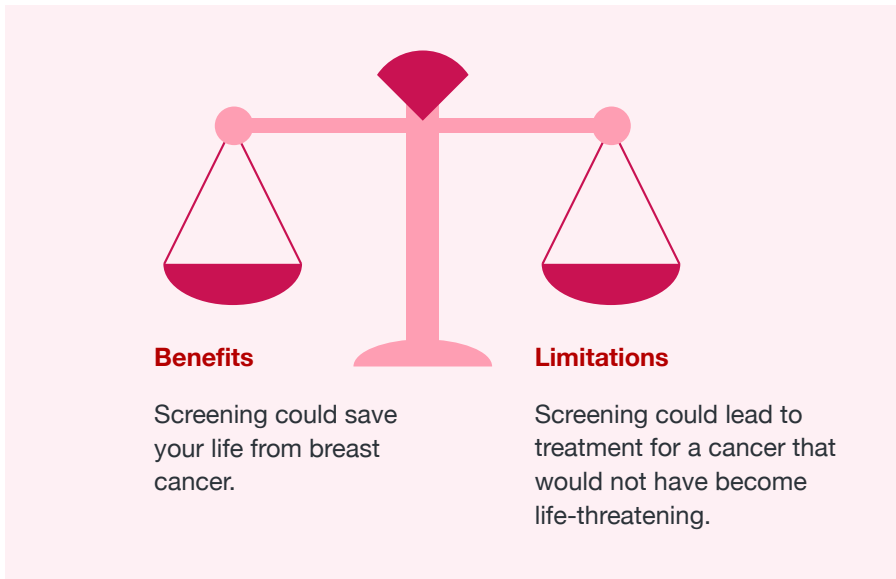
**Remember: Only you can give your consent to be part of our programme. You have to consent before you have your screening test. You can withdraw your consent at any time by contacting us on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 or emailing [info@breastcheck.ie](mailto:info@breastcheck.ie).**

**If you withdraw consent, we will not contact you about the breast screening programme in the future.**

## Screening? It is your decision

It is your choice whether or not to have a BreastCheck screening. You have the right to accept or decline the invitation from BreastCheck. You may also accept an invitation to screening, but later change your mind.

All screening aims to find a balance between potential benefits and potential limitations. You must decide where that balance falls for you.



## More information

For more information, to register or to check if you are on the register, visit [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie) or Freephone 1800 45 45 55.

Email: [info@breastcheck.ie](mailto:info@breastcheck.ie)

Freephone: 1800 45 45 55



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Plain  
English  
Approved by NALA

  
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The National Breast Screening Programme