

Spot breast cancer early



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Together we will beat cancer

Take charge

If you want to know more about spotting the signs of breast cancer, this leaflet is for you.

It may surprise you to know that when diagnosed at its earliest stage, almost everyone with breast cancer survives. So if you do spot something unusual, take charge and speak to your GP.

In this leaflet you can find out about:

- the key signs and symptoms
- information about screening for breast cancer
- steps to reduce your risk
- tips for talking to your doctor

What is breast awareness?

Being breast aware means knowing what your breasts are normally like, which may make it easier to spot any changes.

There's no right or wrong way of doing this. But it's good to have a look and feel, so you know what's normal for you. This includes getting used to what your breasts are like at different times of the month. For example, your breasts might feel more tender or lumpy around the time of your period.

Remember, everybody's breasts are different and what's normal for one person might not be normal for someone else.

You know your body best, so if something's unusual for you or won't go away – tell your doctor.

There's no need to check yourself at a set time or in a set way – but if you know what's normal for you, you may be more likely to spot any changes.

Breast cancer is much more common in people over 50, but it can affect anyone of any age or sex. If you do spot something unusual, tell your doctor. In most cases it won't be cancer – but if it is, finding it at an early stage can make a real difference.



Listen to your body

Being breast aware can be helpful, and remember, lumps are not the only sign of breast cancer.

It's important to listen to your body, and get any unusual changes to your breasts, chest or nipples checked out by your GP, including:

- A change in the size, shape or feel of your breast or chest
- A new lump or thickening in your breast, chest or armpit
- Fluid leaking from a nipple if you aren't pregnant or breastfeeding
- A change in the look or position of a nipple
- Any skin changes on your breast, chest or nipple, such as puckering, dimpling, redness, or a rash or hotness to touch.
- Unexplained pain in your breast or chest
- These are more likely to be signs of other common conditions – but it's still best to get these, or any other unusual changes, checked out.

Look out for your screening invitation

Breast screening is for people who don't have any symptoms. It aims to find breast cancers at an early stage, when treatment is more likely to be successful.

To be invited for screening, you need to be registered with a GP. When you receive your screening invitation, you'll also be sent information about the screening test. It's important you read this, so you can decide if you'd like to take part.

If you're aged 50–70 and registered as female with the GP, you'll be sent an invitation in the post. If you aren't invited for screening, but think it might still be relevant for you, speak to your GP or Gender Identity Clinic.

It's your choice whether or not to attend your breast screening appointment. And it's important you read the information that comes with your invitation, as breast screening has pros and cons.

Even if you've been screened and no matter your age, tell your doctor if you notice anything unusual.

Visit [cruk.org/screening](https://www.cruk.org/screening) to find out more.

During screening, x-rays (mammograms) are taken of your breasts by a female specialist.

Cut your risk

These proven steps can lower your breast cancer risk. Find more tips at [cruk.org/health](https://www.cruk.org/health)



Keep a healthy weight. Weight has a big impact on cancer risk. It can feel hard, but start by making small changes to your diet and activity that are easier to stick to. Try keeping to a meal routine, avoiding snacks, or planning your weekly meals in advance.



Cut back on booze. Alcohol increases the risk of seven types of cancer. The less you drink, the lower the risk. Try having more alcohol-free days each week – it all adds up!



Move more. Being very physically active can help to reduce your risk. Even fitting in more steps, keeping up with household chores, or getting off the bus a stop earlier can help you keep a healthy weight.

What else might affect your risk?



Most breast cancers aren't due to inherited faulty genes. But if close family members have had breast cancer, you may be more likely to get it. Talk to your GP if you're worried about your risk.



Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and oral contraceptives (the Pill) both increase breast cancer risk. But they are effective and have other health benefits – so speak to your doctor to help you decide.

Talk to your doctor

When you're worried that there's something wrong, telling a doctor can seem difficult.

Here are some ideas for how to get the most out of your appointment, whether it's via phone, video or a face to face conversation.



Be honest. Tell the doctor about anything unusual, even if it doesn't seem that important or you think it might be a bit embarrassing.



Be thorough. Mention all your symptoms and don't put it down to 'just getting older', or another health condition. If it's something that's bothering you, then your doctor will want to hear about it.



Stick with it. Don't worry you might be wasting your doctor's time. Even if you've spoken to them already, they want to know if your symptoms haven't gone away, or if something still doesn't feel quite right.



Be prepared. Think about how to describe any changes and how long you've had them for. Writing down what you want to say can help. It can also be useful to have a list of any medications that you take, including over-the-counter or herbal remedies.

Early diagnosis saves lives

Remember, when breast cancer is spotted at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful. Thanks to research, treatments are kinder and more effective than ever.



How to find out more

We're online...



Find out more about spotting cancer early, including information about cancer screening across the UK, at cruk.org/spotcancerearly

...and on the phone



Our Nurse Helpline is there if you're looking for information or support. Just call **0808 800 4040**.

If you'd like to provide any feedback on this leaflet or would like to know more about the information sources used in creating it, please email publications@cancer.org.uk

And if you have any questions about Cancer Research UK or would like to support what we're doing, you can call **0300 123 1022**.