

Breast cancer The key facts



About Breast Cancer Now

We're Breast Cancer Now, the UK's largest breast cancer charity – and we're dedicated to funding research into this devastating disease. We believe that if we all act now, by 2050, everyone who develops breast cancer will live. Join us at breastcancernow.org

Breast Cancer Now is a company limited by guarantee in England (No. 9347608) and a charity registered in England and Wales (No. 1160558), in Scotland (SC045584) and in Isle of Man (1200). Company limited by guarantee in England no 9347608. Fifth Floor, Ibex House, 42–47 Minorities, London EC3N 1DY.
© Breast Cancer Now.

The leaflet is based on more detailed Breast Cancer Now health information and has been reviewed by Breast Cancer Now supporters. We advise readers with concerns about breast cancer to discuss them with a health professional.

If you would like more information about the sources of evidence on which this publication is based, please contact info@breastcancernow.org or call 0333 20 70 300.

Edition 4. Reviewed April 2016. Next review due April 2019.



What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is the collective term for all cancers that originate in breast tissue.

Cells normally multiply in a regular, orderly fashion, but sometimes they change and begin to grow and divide in an irregular, uncontrolled way.

These abnormal cells can form a lump or tumour in the breast. In some cases, they spread to other parts of the body.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK

- One in eight UK women will be diagnosed with breast cancer.
- Over 50,000 women and around 350 men are diagnosed with breast cancer every year.
- Around 1,000 women die from breast cancer every month. However, more women than ever are surviving, thanks to better awareness, screening and treatments.



What causes breast cancer?

Breast cancer is thought to be caused by a combination of our genes, lifestyle choices and surrounding environment.

There are many things, or factors, that can increase or decrease the risk of developing breast cancer. One of the biggest risk factors is increasing age. At least four out of five breast cancers occur in women over 50.

In a small number of cases, breast cancer runs in the family. Most women with breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease or the faulty genes linked to breast cancer.

You can lower your risk of developing breast cancer by making changes such as drinking less alcohol, maintaining a healthy weight and being regularly physically active.

 **Find out more:**
breastcancernow.org/riskfactors

Detecting it early

The earlier breast cancer is diagnosed, the better the chances of beating it.

Women aged 50 and over are entitled to free breast screening (a mammogram). You should get your first appointment between your 50th and 53rd birthdays. You will then receive invitations every three years until you reach 70. After this, you will need to make your own appointments.

Regardless of age it's important to be breast aware as most breast cancers are found by women noticing unusual changes, taking the initiative and visiting their doctor.

All women should be breast aware and women aged 50 and over are entitled to free breast screening.



Find out more:
breastcancer.org/screening

How to be breast aware

Being breast aware simply means knowing what your breasts look and feel like normally, being on the lookout for any unusual changes and getting them checked out by your doctor.

It's as simple as TLC...

Touch your breasts. Can you feel anything unusual?

Look for changes. Is there any change in shape or texture?

Check anything unusual with your doctor.

No one knows your body better than you and everyone will have their own way of touching and looking for changes – there's no special technique and you don't need any training.



Find out more:
breastcancer.org/tlcfacts

How is it treated?

Most women with breast cancer will have more than one treatment. The choice of treatments – and the order in which they are given – depends on the particular circumstances of the patient and the cancer.

Women usually have surgery to remove cancerous tissue from the breast, and also from the armpit if affected.

Afterwards, they often receive additional treatments to reduce the risk of the cancer returning or spreading. These may include radiotherapy, chemotherapy and other drugs.

It is estimated that five out of six women diagnosed with breast cancer in the UK will survive for at least five years.



Find out more:
breastcancer.org/treatment

Find out more

Our health information is based on the latest research and is reviewed by experts, such as clinicians and scientists, as well as by people affected by breast cancer.

It is available free of charge within the UK and covers:

- How to be breast aware
- What affects your risk
- Diagnosis and treatment
- Information for people with a family history of breast cancer.

Visit breastcancer.org

Or to order copies of our publications:

Call 0333 20 70 300

Email info@breastcancer.org

Go to breastcancer.org/publications