

Every 3 years, women aged 50 to 70 in Northern Ireland are invited for breast screening. This involves a special x-ray known as a mammogram. Women over 70 are not automatically invited for screening but are encouraged to make their own appointment by contacting their local screening centre (see page 6).

Why do I need breast screening?

Breast screening reduces the risk of dying from breast cancer.

- Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among women in Northern Ireland – statistics from the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry show that 1 in 12 women will develop it before the age of 75.
- The risk of breast cancer rises as women get older.
- Breast screening can help find breast cancer at an early stage before any other signs or symptoms appear.
- If breast cancer is found at an early stage there is a good chance of a successful recovery.

What happens when I attend?

Your visit for screening may take up to 30 minutes. For your mammogram you will have to undress from the waist up, so it is a good idea to wear a separate top instead of a dress. The screening staff will place each breast in turn between two special x-ray plates. The mammogram takes only a few seconds and involves a small dose of radiation.

Where do I go?

Depending on where you live, you will be invited to attend either your local screening centre (see contact details) or a mobile unit. Both perform largely the same function but the mobile units have restricted access, so if you have limited

mobility you may find it easier to attend the screening centre. If you have breast implants you should only attend the screening centre (see the leaflet *What if I have breast implants?* available at the centre when you come for screening or on www.cancerscreening.n-i.nhs.uk).

Is breast screening painful?

Some women may find it a bit uncomfortable and a few may find it painful, as the breasts have to be held firmly in position and some pressure applied to get the best possible picture. However, it doesn't take long and many women find it less uncomfortable the next time.

When do I get my results?

Your results will normally be sent to you and your GP within 3 weeks.

What does it mean if I am called back?

Around 1 woman in 20 is called back for a second visit. This is because the result suggests that further tests are needed. This does not necessarily mean there is something wrong – 4 out of 5 women recalled are given normal results following these additional tests.

How reliable is breast screening?

It is the most reliable way of detecting breast cancer early. However, it is not perfect as not all cancers will be detected.

Does breast screening prevent breast cancer?

No. Breast screening helps to detect breast cancer at an early stage when treatment may be more successful. However, it can only help to find breast cancer if it is already there. Breast cancer can develop at any time and some women can develop it between screening visits. You should check your breasts regularly for any changes (see the leaflet *Breast awareness: looking out for changes*). If you have any worries contact your GP, even if you have had a recent mammogram.

Where did you obtain my contact details?

Your details were obtained from your GP's list, so it is important that he or she always has your correct name and address. GP practices are contacted, in turn, every 3 years so you will not necessarily get your invitation in the year that you turn 50. As long as you are registered with your GP, you will be invited for breast screening by your 53rd birthday.

How is my screening information used?

Screening records are regularly reviewed in order to monitor and improve the quality of the programme and to increase the expertise of specialist staff. This is an important part of any

screening programme. Staff working for the Northern Ireland breast screening programme may see and review your records. If you need any further information on how your records are kept and shared, you can contact the Quality Assurance Reference Centre on: 028 9055 3949.

What if I am under 50 years of age?

Breast screening is not offered to women under 50 because below this age:

- the risk of breast cancer is lower;
- women generally have denser breast tissue which makes their mammograms much more difficult to read.

However, if you are worried about a breast problem or have a family history of breast cancer, you should contact your GP.

What if I have had breast cancer already?

If you have been treated for breast cancer in the past and you have completed post-treatment care, it is important that you come for the 3-yearly screening when invited.

If you have any questions please contact your GP or local screening centre.

Screening centres

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

(also covering South Eastern HSC Trust)
The Screening Centre
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS
Tel: 028 9033 3700

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Northern Area Breast Screening and Assessment Unit
Level A, Antrim Area Hospital
45 Bush Road, Antrim BT41 2RL
Tel: 028 9442 4425

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

The Breast Screening Unit
Lurgan Hospital
Sloan Street, Lurgan BT66 8NX
Tel: 028 3834 7083

Western Health and Social Care Trust

The Breast Screening Unit
Ground Floor, The Nurses' Home
Altnagelvin Area Hospital
Glenshane Road, Londonderry BT47 6SB
Tel: 028 7161 1443

For further information on breast screening in Northern Ireland or for this leaflet in other languages or alternative formats, visit

www.cancerscreening.n-i.nhs.uk

or contact your local screening centre.



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Breast Screening

Breast screening can save lives