

Your breasts, your health a quick guide to being breast aware



Introduction

Whatever your age, size or shape it's important to take care of your breasts. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK, so it's important to look after your breasts by being breast aware.

Being breast aware is part of caring for your body. It means getting to know how your breasts look and feel so you know what is normal for you. You can then feel more confident about noticing any unusual changes.

Most changes won't turn out to be breast cancer, but if they are breast cancer, the sooner this is diagnosed the more effective treatment may be.

Breast changes are not usually accompanied by other symptoms, such as feeling tired or having less energy, so, even if you feel well it is still important to visit your GP.

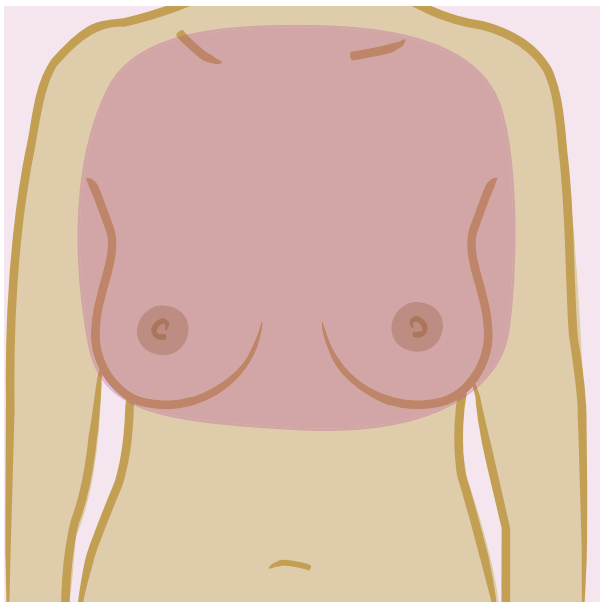
Although it's rare, men can also get breast cancer so they need to be breast aware too.

How do I check my breasts?

There's no right or wrong way to check your breasts. Just try to get used to looking at and feeling your breasts regularly. You can do this in the bath or shower, when you use body lotion, or when you get dressed. You decide what is comfortable and best for you.

Remember to check all parts of your breast, your armpits and up to your collarbone.

Areas to check

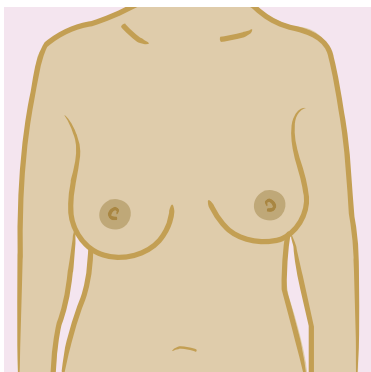


What changes should I look and feel for?

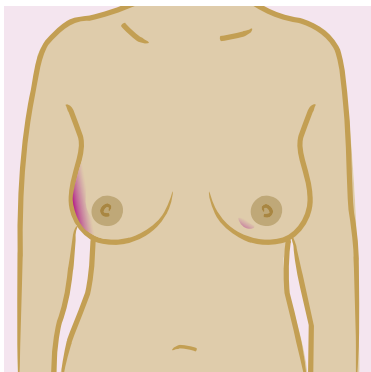
Everyone's breasts look and feel different. For many women it's normal to have lumpy breasts and/or tenderness or pain around their period. It's also common to have one breast larger than the other, or breasts that are different shapes.

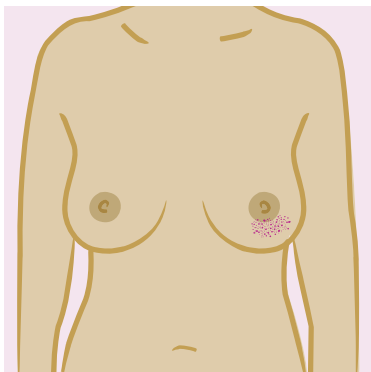
When checking your breasts, try to be aware of any changes that are different for you. The next pages show what these could be.

A change in size or shape

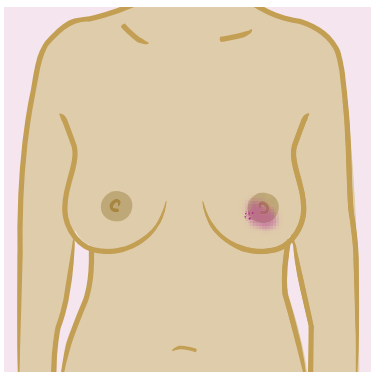


A lump or thickening that feels different from the rest of the breast tissue

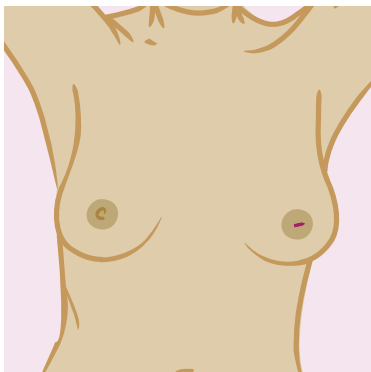




A change in skin texture such as puckering or dimpling (like orange peel)

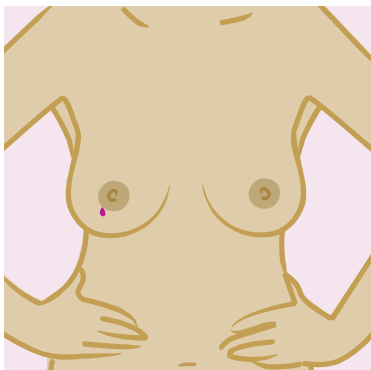


Redness or a rash on the skin and/or around the nipple (which may look like eczema)

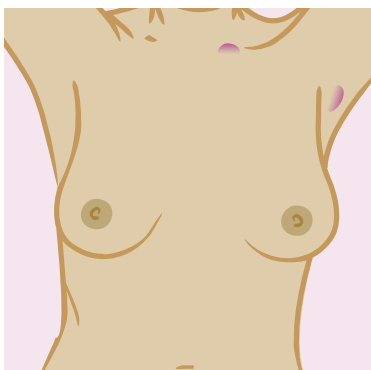


If your nipple becomes inverted (pulled in) or changes its position or shape

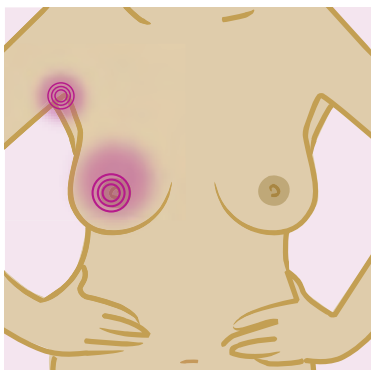
**Discharge (liquid)
from one or both of
your nipples**



**A swelling in your
armpit or around
your collarbone**



**Constant pain
in your breast
or your armpit**





When checking your breasts,
try to be aware of any changes
that are different for you.

When should I see the doctor?

You know better than anyone how your breasts look and feel normally, so if you notice a change, go and see your GP as soon as you can. Most breast changes are likely to be normal or due to a benign breast condition rather than being a sign of breast cancer.

If your GP is male and you don't feel comfortable going to see him, you can ask if there is a female doctor available. But you do need to find out what is causing the change. You can ask for a female nurse to be present at your appointment. You can also take a friend or relative with you.



When will I get invited for breast screening?

Women are invited for a mammogram (breast x-ray) every three years from the age of 50 to 70 as most breast cancers occur after the age of 50. (In England this age range is being extended to 47–73 by the end of 2016.) You have to be registered with a GP to be sent an appointment.

Women under 50 are not invited for routine breast screening. This is mainly because the number of women who get breast cancer is much lower in this age group – 81% of breast cancers occur in women over the age of 50 and the risk continues to increase with age. Also, younger women's breast tissue can be dense which can make the x-ray images less clear so normal changes or benign breast conditions can be harder to identify.

If you are over 70 you won't be sent an invitation but you can ask to be screened every three years as you are still at risk.

Breast cancer can develop between screening mammograms so it's important to continue to be breast aware and report any changes to your GP even if you've had a mammogram recently. If you have any questions about the benefits and limitations of breast screening, talk to your GP or you can visit www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen



A small number of cases (less than 10 per cent) do run in the family and may be caused by a faulty gene.

Does breast cancer run in families?

Breast cancer is a common disease, with one in eight women in the UK developing it during their lifetime. So it is not unusual to have one or two people in an extended family who have had breast cancer.

However, a small number of cases (less than 10%) do run in the family and may be caused by inheriting a faulty gene. Talk to your GP if you are concerned about your family history of breast cancer.

Can I reduce my risk of getting breast cancer?

It is not known exactly what causes breast cancer but we do know that being female and getting older are the main risk factors.

You may help to reduce your risk – and look after your general health – by:

- maintaining a healthy weight
- doing regular exercise
- not drinking too much alcohol
- eating a well-balanced diet without too much saturated fat and plenty of fruit and vegetables.

The breast awareness 5-point code

- 1** You should know what is normal for you
- 2** Know what changes to look for
- 3** Look and feel
- 4** Tell your GP about any changes straightaway
- 5** Go for breast screening when invited

Department of Health, 2009

This leaflet can be downloaded from our website, **www.breastcancercare.org.uk** It is also available in large print, Braille or on audio CD on request by phoning **0845 092 0808**.

This leaflet has been produced by Breast Cancer Care's clinical specialists and reviewed by healthcare professionals and members of the public. If you would like a list of the sources we used to research this publication, email **publications@breastcancercare.org.uk** or call **0845 092 0808**.

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Breast Cancer Care is here for anyone affected by breast cancer. We bring people together, provide information and support, and campaign for improved standards of care. We use our understanding of people's experience of breast cancer and our clinical expertise in everything we do.

We promote the importance of early detection of breast cancer and provide accurate answers to questions about breast health. We believe that up-to-date information, based on clinical evidence, builds confidence and helps people take control of their health. Our training, workshops and resources explain how to be breast aware and what changes to look and feel for

Visit **www.breastcancercare.org.uk** or call our free Helpline on **0808 800 6000** (Text Relay **18001**). Interpreters are available in any language.

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