

Screening mammography for women with a family history of breast cancer



BreastScreen WA is a free screening mammography service for women. It is an important health check for women aged 50-74 years but women from age 40 years may attend. This pamphlet should answer some of the questions you may have about screening mammography if you have a relative who has had breast cancer.

What does it mean to have a family history of breast cancer?

- At least one member of your family has had breast cancer.
- When several members of the same family have been diagnosed with the same disease, it is natural to wonder if it is due to an inherited factor.
- Breast cancer itself cannot be inherited, but the faulty breast cancer genes can be inherited. If a woman has a faulty gene she is at increased risk, but is not certain to develop breast cancer.
- Most breast cancer occurs by chance alone and is not caused by genetic factors. Familial breast cancer accounts for only 1-5% of all breast cancer.

Reassuring facts for women with a family history of breast cancer

For many women, knowing they have a family history of breast cancer is cause for concern. It is, however important to keep in mind:

- Australian women have a 1 in 7 chance of developing breast cancer in their lifetime.
- Breast cancer is a common disease which is largely associated with increasing age. For a large proportion of women this happens by chance and not as a result of a family history.
- Having a mother or sister with breast cancer does not mean you will automatically develop breast cancer.
- Developing breast cancer does not mean you definitely inherited the faulty gene, or will pass it on to your children.
- About 9 out of every 10 women who develop breast cancer do not have any family history of breast cancer.

Your family history becomes more important:

- When more than one relative on the same side of your family (mother or father's side) has been diagnosed with breast cancer.
- When those relatives were aged less than 50 years when first diagnosed.
- When those relatives with breast cancer are more closely related to you (sister rather than cousin).
- When there is breast cancer in both breasts, male breast cancer, or breast and ovarian cancer in the family.

How does having a family history affect me accessing BreastScreen WA?

BreastScreen WA recommends regular two yearly screening mammograms particularly for women aged 50-74 years, as research shows the benefit of screening mammography is greatest in this age group. Women aged 40-49 and over 75 years are also welcome to attend for a mammogram.

BreastScreen WA collects family history information at the time of screening. For a small number of women, the nature of their family history may require them to attend more frequently for a screening mammogram.

If I have a family history of breast cancer, at what age should I start screening, and how often should I be screened?

Women from the age of 40 with a significant family history of breast cancer are eligible for a screening mammogram every year if they have one of the following:

- A first degree relative (mother, sister, daughter, father, son, brother) with breast cancer diagnosed before the age of 50.
- A first degree relative with cancer in both breasts (diagnosed at any age).
- Two or more first degree relatives with breast cancer (diagnosed at any age).

Women with one first degree relative affected with breast cancer over the age of 50, are at NO greater risk than that of the average woman in the community. These women will be offered a screening mammogram every two years.

What else should I do?

If you are concerned about your family history of breast cancer, you should discuss your individual circumstances with your family doctor. If there are any new cases of breast cancer diagnosed in your family it is important that you inform both BreastScreen WA and your GP.

Remember, Be Breast Aware:

- Look and feel for any changes in your breasts that are not normal for you.
- See your GP promptly if you notice any changes in your breast.

Any questions?

The staff at BreastScreen WA are happy to answer any of your questions. Please phone (08) 9323 6700 or 13 20 50.

An appointment can be made by ringing 13 20 50 (for the cost of a local call)

If you need a free interpreter, please call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) first on 13 14 50 and ask to be connected to our booking service on 13 20 50.



Government of Western Australia
North Metropolitan Health Service



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Email breastscreenwa@health.wa.gov.au National Relay Service www.relayservice.gov.au

Telephone (08) 9323 6700 Bookings 13 20 50

www.breastscreen.health.wa.gov.au