

Mammogram (Mammography or Breast Screening)

A mammogram is a diagnostic test used to look for any problems within the breast and surrounding tissues.



The test uses low-dose x-rays to take pictures of both breasts.

What happens during a mammogram?

You will be asked some routine questions before your examination to help the doctor reporting on your images.

After undressing to your waist the mammographer will position you next to the x-ray machine and then will place each of your breasts in turn onto the x-ray table compressing them firmly with a plastic plate while the picture is taken. This takes only a few seconds and then the pressure is released. This compression can be uncomfortable but remember it's only for a few seconds. At least two views are taken on each side in order to show all of the breast tissue. After the mammographer has told you how you will get your results you will be free to go. The whole examination should take no more than 15 minutes.

All our mammography images are looked at by 2 reading specialists based in our hospital in Cheltenham. The report will usually be sent out to you within 4 working days. A copy is also sent to your GP for their records.

If the report is abnormal, one of our doctors will telephone you to explain the problem and to advise you of what to do next. We usually ask you to make an appointment with your own doctor so that he can refer you to your local NHS hospital for any extra tests you may need. If you prefer we can also refer you to a private consultant if you have medical insurance or wish to self pay. Just let our doctor know when you get a call

What might my results be?

96% of all women screened receive a normal result. The remaining 4% of women require further tests before a diagnosis can be made. These further tests may include an [ultrasound scan](#), further mammogram images, a clinical examination and maybe a [biopsy](#) where some tissue is removed from the breast and sent for analysis. This is obviously very worrying but only 1 woman in every 100 screened will be diagnosed with cancer.

Your breast images may be obviously normal or may be abnormal. However, there is a group in the middle that are not definitely normal or abnormal. This is the difficult group of images that require further tests before a decision can be made.

Most women in this middle category are given the all clear after extra tests. But some cancers may be found, so this category cannot be ignored.

You may feel relieved when told you are clear but you may also feel angry that anxiety has been caused. Unfortunately there is not yet a simple yes/no test for breast cancer.

Other possible results

- **A false negative result:** You may receive a normal result when there is actually an abnormality present.
- **A false positive result:** You may receive an abnormal result when (after further tests) your breasts are found to be normal
- **Interval cancer:** This is a cancer which develops between screenings. Cancers can develop at any time. It has been calculated that when screening women aged between 50-70 years, for every 1000 women screened 1.2 interval cancers will occur during the following 24 months.**

Whenever we learn of a suspected interval cancer occurring in one of our clients we investigate by reviewing the most recent screening images and then comparing them with any images taken when a cancer is diagnosed. We want to learn about the progression of the disease and also ensure we haven't missed any changes at the time of screening.

What about over diagnosis?

Over diagnosis is defined as cancers detected at screening that would not have otherwise become clinically apparent in the woman's lifetime. It is a major disadvantage of screening. A screen detected cancer may never progress to produce symptoms and if left undetected the woman may die of other causes before the breast cancer becomes evident. These screen detected cancers are treated with surgery, radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy, so are not without side effects. The independent review calculated that in women invited for screening about 11%* of cancers diagnosed in their lifetime would constitute over diagnosis.

Making the decision that's right for you

When you are deciding whether to have a breast screening, it is important that you have all the relevant information in order to make an informed choice. Everyone wants and expects a normal result but you should consider the possibility that your result may not be straight forward and you may require further tests. This is all part of the screening process. Most women will be given the all clear after these tests but some will go on to have surgery or other forms of treatment. Having any extra tests will cause anxiety even if the outcome is good.

Breast screening is designed for well women with no current breast symptoms. If you are worried about your breasts you should visit your GP in the first instance. They can advise you and if necessary refer you to an NHS or private facility. Some of our hospitals can offer one stop appointments. Please contact your nearest Nuffield Health Hospital for full details.

How can I book a mammogram?

If you would like to have a mammogram we can arrange one for you if you:

- Are over 40 years of age
- Have not had a mammogram within the last 12 months

- You have no current breast problems
- You are not breast feeding

Call our contact centre on **03031 230813** and the advisor can tell you where your nearest Nuffield Health breast screening facility is located. They can also advise you of the cost.

*[NHSBSP information leaflet ? Helping You Decide](#)

**[Quality assurance guidelines for breast cancer screening radiology](#), NHSBSP pub. 59

Source URL: <https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/hospitals/tests-and-treatments/tests/mammography>