

Most women
who develop breast
cancer are aged
50 years or over



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BreastScreen NSW visit**
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BreastScreen
NSW

Binformed

I'm under 40.
Is it time for
a screening
mammogram?

BreastScreen NSW is a free breast screening service targeting women aged 50 to 74 years. The government funded service aims to detect breast cancer in its early stages, when treatment can be most effective.

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13 20 50

20 minutes every 2 years
could save your life

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Women under 40 years of age are not eligible to attend BreastScreen NSW. This is based on international evidence that shows no benefit, in terms of deaths prevented, for women in this age group.

Why aren't women under 40 screened?

The tissue of young women's breasts tends to be more dense than that of older women. This is due to the influence of hormones. On a screening mammogram, dense breast tissue shows up as a white area. Breast cancers also appear white and are therefore more difficult to find on young women's screening mammograms.

Screening mammograms are usually more accurate as women get older, as the breast tissue becomes less dense. Breast cancers are easier to see against a darker background.

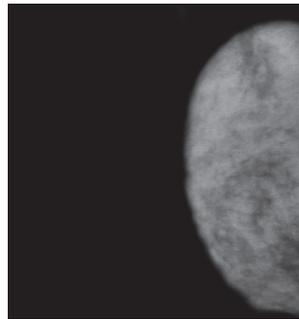
If a lump or other breast change is present in women under 40 years, mammography may still be useful. If you find a change in your breast you should see your doctor immediately.

Younger women are at less risk of breast cancer

Most women who develop breast cancer are aged 50 years or over. Of the 4,606 women in NSW diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009, 77.4% (3,566) were women in this age group. In comparison, 17.8% (819) were women aged 40 to 49 years and 4.8% (221) were women aged 39 years or younger.¹

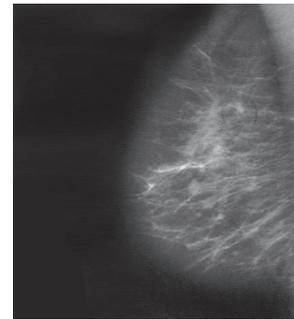
When will breast cancer screening be of benefit to me?

You are welcome to attend BreastScreen NSW for a screening mammogram when you turn 40 years of age. However, a screening mammogram has been shown to be of most benefit, in terms of deaths prevented, for women aged 50 to 74 years.



Breast x-ray of a woman aged 33 years.

Note dense breast tissue shows a larger white area.



Breast x-ray of a woman aged 60 years.

Note breast tissue is less dense. Cancer shows as a white mass (circled) against a dark background.

What should I do now?

Breast health is important for all women. The choice to have a screening mammogram is yours, however medical authorities recommend it especially for women aged 50 to 74 years.

Be breast aware and get to know the normal look and feel of your breasts. See your doctor immediately if you notice any unusual changes in your breasts such as a lump, skin dimpling, bloody or clear nipple discharge.

What are the differences between screening and diagnostic mammography?

A screening mammogram is a routine breast x-ray for women without breast symptoms. It is available free for women aged 40 years and over at BreastScreen NSW.

No doctor's referral is needed.

A diagnostic mammogram is a breast x-ray for women with breast symptoms or where an abnormality is suspected. A doctor's referral is necessary and a rebate for diagnostic mammography is available through Medicare or a private radiology practice.

If you have noticed any breast symptoms such as a lump, skin dimpling, bloody or clear nipple discharge you should see your doctor immediately.

What if I have a family history of breast cancer?

Approximately 10% of breast cancer cases can be attributed to an inherited faulty gene.² Younger women who have a relative with breast cancer may have a higher risk of developing the disease but this is not true in many cases.

The risk of developing breast cancer will depend on a number of factors including:

- How many relatives have had breast cancer
- The age when breast cancer was found
- How closely they are related.

If you are concerned about your family history of breast cancer you should discuss this with your doctor. Screening mammograms for young women with a proven family history of breast cancer are available on referral by a doctor to a radiology centre. Genetic counselling can clarify if you are at risk based on family history.

Who is eligible for screening?

40 to 49 years

Screening is available to women aged between 40 to 49 years who wish to attend. However, the latest evidence does not justify a national mammographic screening program which would actively recruit women in this age group.

50 to 74 years

Medical authorities recommend screening mammography for women aged 50 to 74 years. Women aged 50 to 74 are actively encouraged to attend for a screening mammogram. Screening has been shown to be of significant benefit, in terms of deaths prevented, for women in this age group.

Over 75 years

Screening is available to women aged 75 years or over. While screening is of benefit, women in this age group may have other health priorities.

1. Cancer Institute NSW 2014

2. NHMRC National Breast Cancer Centre 1998