

## Breast x-ray screening

A breast x-ray or mammogram is the best way to detect breast cancer in its earliest stages among women aged 50 to 69 years. Early detection can improve the chances of successful treatment and recovery. Breast x-ray screening aims to show changes that are too small to be felt by you or your doctor and that cannot be found in any other way. Screening is normally recommended once every two years.

### The risk increases with age

While all women are at risk of developing breast cancer, it is far more common as we grow older. Screening mammograms are most effective for women aged 50 to 69 years. This is because the breast tissue in younger women is more dense and can make a mammogram difficult to read. If you are aged 50 to 69, BreastScreen Victoria will send a letter to remind you when your next visit is due.

If you are aged 40 to 49 years, you can have a screening mammogram at BreastScreen if you request it, but you will not be re-invited until you are 50. Similarly, women aged over 69 do not receive reminders to attend but are welcome to make an appointment with BreastScreen Victoria as long as it is at least two years since their last visit.

If you have had breast cancer in the past, talk over screening options with your specialist, as the screening program may not be suitable for you.

### Preparing for your mammogram

Some suggestions to prepare for your mammogram include:

- Wear separates such as a top and a skirt since you'll have to undress from the waist up.
- If you are still having periods, book your appointment for mid-cycle, when your breasts may be less tender.

### Having your mammogram

A health worker will greet you and explain what happens. Feel free to ask any questions. The radiographer will position your breasts one at a time between two flat plates on the x-ray machine. The x-ray uses a very low dose of radiation and the procedure takes only a few minutes. It may feel uncomfortable because each breast is held quite firmly while the x-ray is taken. If it feels painful, tell the radiographer.

### The results

A mammogram can find most cancers that are present at the time of the x-ray but, like many other medical tests, it is not 100 per cent accurate. Most women will be pleased to find there are no signs of cancer. If your x-rays show any change in your breast tissue, you may be called back to have more x-rays and further tests. Most women who are called back do not have cancer.

### Where to get help

- Your doctor
- BreastScreen Victoria Tel. 13 20 50
- Women's health centre

### Things to remember

- The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age.
- Breast x-rays or mammograms are the best way to detect cancer in its earliest stages among women aged 50 to 69 years.
- A mammogram every two years is recommended.
- Most changes in breast tissue are not cancer.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

BreastScreen Victoria

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