

WHAT IS BREAST CANCER?

Cancer is caused when certain **cells in the body grow and increase in number without stopping**. They then make a lump or growth. In breast cancer, these cells start in the breast tissue. Cancer cells can spread from one part of the body to another (metastasize) causing damage to other organs.

WHAT IS MY RISK?

Breast cancer is a common type of cancer in women. Women over 50 are more likely to develop breast cancer than younger women, but women in their 30s and 40s can get it too. Men can also get breast cancer, but it's very rare.

There isn't a specific reason for most breast cancer. Your risk of getting breast cancer may be higher if a close family member like your mother, sister, or daughter has had it. Having a more distant relative like your grandmother, cousin, or aunt have had breast cancer will only slightly increase your risk.

Breast cancer risk is higher for women who have increased exposure to female hormones (oestrogen) in the body. This may be women who have no children, or have children when they are older, or women who use the oestrogen containing contraceptive pill or oestrogen-containing hormone replacement for many years. Being overweight and drinking a lot of alcohol can also increase the risk of getting breast cancer. Breastfeeding for over 6 months, keeping your weight within the normal range, and following a healthy diet may decrease your chance of getting breast cancer.

HOW CAN I ENSURE EARLY DETECTION?

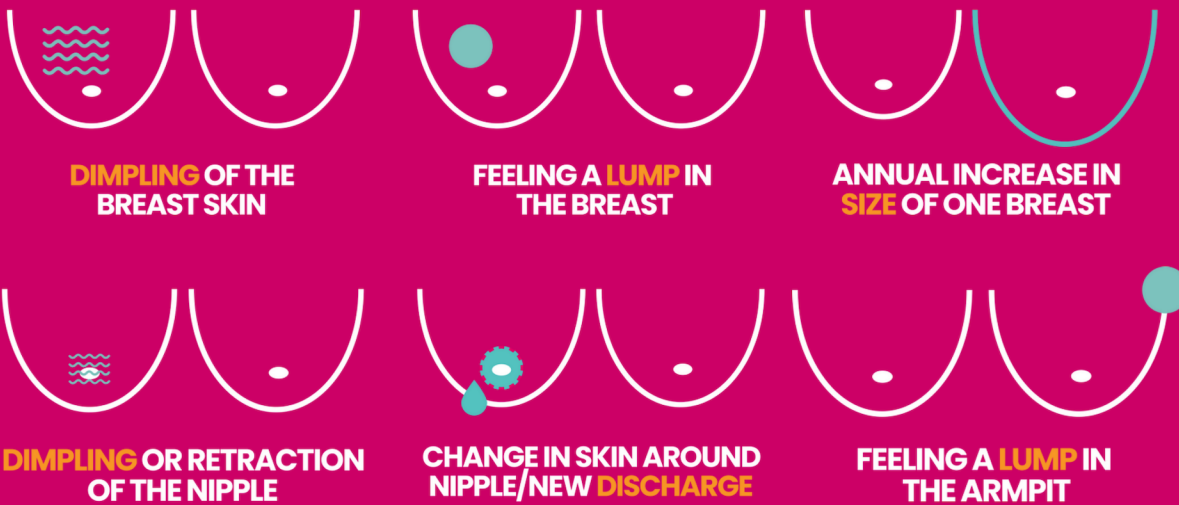
It is important to know what is normal for your breasts. You do not have to follow a particular schedule but should be aware of the normal shape and feel of your breasts. You may notice this when in the bath or shower or when looking in the mirror. If you notice any of the changes shown below, consult your local clinic or doctor immediately. It is better to check immediately rather than to wait for the change to disappear.

Though it has not been proven to be helpful in big trials, some clinics recommend **regular self-examination of your breasts**. You can ask your doctor to show you this during your clinic visit. If you do choose to examine your breasts every month, this should be done 4 days after your menstrual period.



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Breast cancer usually starts with a lump in the breast. The lump usually doesn't hurt. Breast cancer can also start as an itchy, scaly rash on the nipple or it may be picked up on a mammogram for another breast complaint. **These are the common signs of breast cancer:**



HOW DOES THE HOSPITAL CHECK?

- Your doctor or nurse will ask some questions to see what your **risk is for breast cancer**
- The doctor will look at and feel your breasts and under your arms.
- Women over 40 will have a breast X-ray called a **mammogram** to check for signs of cancer
- Young women who have a low risk for breast cancer and have a **normal breast examination** will not need a mammogram.
- If a lump is found, they will use a needle to remove some cells to test in the laboratory and check if they are cancerous. This is called a **biopsy**.

CAN BREAST CANCER BE CURED?

Yes, many women with breast cancer can be cured. The successful treatment of breast cancer depends on how advanced the cancer is when it is picked up (how big it is and whether it has spread). **That's why it's important to pick up the signs of breast cancer early.**



If you notice a worrying change in your breasts, you can make a Breast Clinic appointment by calling **021 404 5566**. If the wait for an appointment is over one month, you can ask your doctor or clinic nurse to write an urgent referral letter and we will see you at the **next Friday Breast Clinic at Groote Schuur Hospital**.