

Breast cancer risk assessment: high risk

This leaflet is for women with a **high risk of breast cancer (following a family history risk assessment).**

It gives information on how common breast cancer is, screening, genetic testing and how the risk of breast cancer can be altered. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor, genetic counsellor or nurse caring for you.

Contact details

Clinic telephone number: _____

Seen in clinic by: _____

Date of risk assessment: _____

What is a high risk of breast cancer?

Breast cancer is a common disease. In the general population about one in eight women in the UK will develop breast cancer.

Breast cancer affects 1 in 8 women



Having a high risk means that your risk of getting breast cancer is higher than in women with no family history of the disease.

Some women with a high risk of breast cancer may also have an increased risk of ovarian cancer depending on the family history of cancer. This can be discussed with your genetics doctor or genetic counsellor.

What about genetic testing?

Only about 5-10% of all breast cancers happen because of an inherited tendency (also called a genetic predisposition). If you have a high risk of breast cancer then it is possible, but by no means definite, that the cancer in your family could be caused by an inherited tendency.

Genetic testing is offered to some families with an increased risk of breast cancer depending on the exact details about the family tree.

If genetic testing is possible this begins by looking for a gene fault ('mutation') in a relative who has breast cancer. This is called diagnostic genetic testing, or a 'mutation search' genetic test. Genetic testing may still be possible if the relative has died. Genetic testing can be discussed with your genetics doctor or genetic counsellor.

Do women with a high risk of breast cancer need breast screening?

Yes. Screening for women with a family history of breast cancer is based on nationally recommended guidelines – these can be found on the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence website at **www.nice.org.uk**. A separate leaflet about breast screening is available.

Current guidelines recommend that women with a high risk of breast cancer have mammograms once a year from 40 to 59 years old. Women with an exceptionally high risk of breast cancer may be eligible for breast screening under the age of 40.

For most women with a high risk there is no evidence that screening before the age of 40 is helpful, even if your relatives have had breast cancer before this age. Also some young women have breast tissue that is too 'dense' (tightly packed) for a mammogram to produce clear images.

From age 60 to 70 you will be offered mammograms every three years like all other women in the UK. You will not need mammograms more often than women in the general population because:

- breast cancer is easier to see on a mammogram after the menopause
- if breast cancer does occur, it is likely to grow more slowly in women aged 50 or over.

Women over 70 can request that breast cancer screening continues every three years if they wish. A separate leaflet is available which explains this.

All women are encouraged to be breast aware. Contact your GP if you notice any changes in your breasts. Please do not wait until your next mammogram.

Can anything alter breast cancer risk?

Yes – the following can alter the risk:

- the Oral Contraceptive Pill and Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) slightly increase the risk of breast cancer while a woman is taking it and for up to five years after it is stopped
- alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer
- pregnancy and breast-feeding lower the risk of breast cancer
- being overweight increases the risk of breast cancer for women after the menopause
- regular exercise lowers the risk of breast cancer
- eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and lowering cholesterol intake helps lower the risk of cancer
- if anyone else in your family develops cancer, particularly breast or ovarian cancer, then this could alter your risk – if this happens please ask for a reassessment of your risk.

[illegible]

Notes

[illegible]

Useful contacts

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Breast Cancer Care

t: 0808 800 6000 **www.breastcancercare.org.uk**

Macmillan Cancer Support

t: 0808 808 0000 **www.macmillan.org.uk**

Leaflet number: 3010/VER2

Date published: March 2014

Review date: March 2017

© 2014 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust