

# At what age should a woman be screened for breast cancer?

BreastScreen SA (BSSA) provides free screening mammograms every two years, primarily for women aged 50 to 74, with the aim of reducing deaths from breast cancer through early detection of the disease.

GPs play an integral role in encouraging women to make an appointment, as well as managing women who are symptomatic or diagnosed through the service.

## Breast screening for different age groups

### Women under 40

Women younger than 40 are not eligible for screening at BSSA. Currently, screening mammography is not an effective method of detecting breast cancer in younger women. If a woman has a strong family history of breast cancer, she should discuss options for breast cancer surveillance with her doctor.

### Women aged 40 to 49

Women aged 40 to 49 are welcome to attend BSSA if they wish. Once a woman attends, she will be invited back every two years.

Women with a strong family history of breast cancer may be invited back annually from age 40.

### Women aged 50 to 74 (the target age group)

Women in this age group are strongly encouraged to attend for a breast screen every two years. In South Australia, regular screening mammograms have been found to reduce a woman's chance of dying from breast cancer by up to 41%<sup>1</sup>.

### Women 75 years and older

As the risk of getting breast cancer continues to increase with age and does not stop at 74, women are welcome to continue screening after the age of 74. However, as research is less clear of the benefit for regular screening in this age group, they will no longer receive invitations from BSSA to attend.

Women are encouraged to discuss their own personal situation with their GP when deciding if breast screening is still the right choice for them.

1 - Roder, D., Houssami, N., Gill, G., Luke, C., Downey, P., Beckmann, K., Iosifidis, P., Grieve, L., Williamson, L. (2008). 'Population screening and intensity of screening are associated with reduced breast cancer mortality: evidence of efficacy of mammography screening in Australia, Breast Cancer Research and Treatment, 108(3): 409-416, Epub 2007 May 22.

## Women with a strong family history of breast cancer

Women with a strong family history of breast cancer are encouraged to start breast screening from age 40.

A woman is said to have a strong family history if she has one of the following:

- > a first-degree relative (mother/sister/daughter, father/brother/son) with breast cancer diagnosed before the age of 50
- > a first-degree relative with cancer in both breasts (diagnosed at any age)
- > two first-degree relatives with breast cancer (diagnosed at any age).

We recommend that women discuss their individual circumstances with their doctor.

## Special considerations

### Women taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

Regular screening mammograms are recommended for women taking HRT. Women with concerns relating to HRT should discuss them with their GP.

### Women with breast implants, pace makers and other medical devices

Breast screening is considered safe for women with implants (including pace makers and defibrillators), and special care is given at the time of the appointment to ensure high-quality X-ray images are taken. For more information, please see BreastScreen SA's brochure, *Screening for women with implants*.

### Women living with a disability

It is recommended that women living with a disability contact BreastScreen SA on 13 20 50 to discuss their personal health requirements and/or individual circumstances prior to making an appointment. For more information, please see the Eligibility section of the BreastScreen SA website at [www.breastscreen.sa.gov.au](http://www.breastscreen.sa.gov.au).

### Women who have had breast cancer in the last five years

If a woman has had breast cancer within the last five years, she is best to have regular check-ups with her specialist or doctor. Women are eligible to attend the screening program again after five years, at the discretion of their specialist or GP.

### Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding

Women who are breastfeeding are not eligible for screening until at least three months after they have stopped breast feeding.

Pregnant women will not be screened.

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## For more information

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