

HEALTH MANAGEMENT
INSIGHTS

Breast Cancer

Awareness Month: It's time for some TLC.

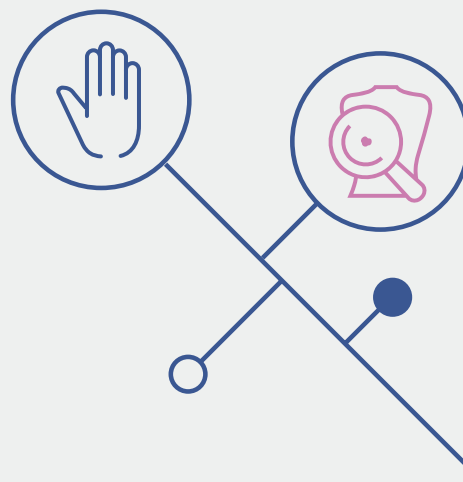
To mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we've compiled some information explaining who is at risk, what to look out for and how to check for symptoms, including the golden rule: TLC - Touch, Look, Check.

Breast Cancer is the commonest cancer in women in the UK. It is commoner in women **over the age of 50 (80%)** who have been through the menopause but it can also affect very young women too, in their **20's**.



It affects **1 in 7 women** so it is likely you will know someone affected by it.

And don't forget, **1% of breast cancers are in men** – so if a man finds a lump behind the nipple – **GET IT CHECKED OUT.**



Get checking

Breast cancer usually presents as a lump and is usually discovered by the woman (or man) themselves. This shows you the importance of being **breast aware** and of regularly checking your breasts for lumps and bumps. So many women are too scared to check themselves and are frightened of what they might find. **Don't be scared!** Check away.



Remember you are the best person to check yourself as you can do so every month – ideally, the week after your period when your breasts are softer and less tender.

Asking your doctor or nurse to do this once a year for you is really not frequent enough. There are some great information sheets on breast self examination listed below.



Most lumps are **harmless**

If you find a lump really early on, it could be completely harmless, for instance a little cyst. In other cases, detecting cancerous a lump at an early stage could be life-saving.

What to look out for

- > a new lump or area of thickened tissue in either breast that was not there before
- > a change in the size or shape of one or both breasts
- > a discharge of fluid from either of your nipples
- > a lump or swelling in either of your armpits
- > dimpling on the skin of your breasts
- > a rash on or around your nipple
- > a change in the appearance of your nipple, such as becoming sunken into your breast

Interestingly, breast pain is not usually a symptom of breast cancer but any persistent pain should be checked out.





Risk factors

Unfortunately some people have a genetic predisposition to developing breast cancer but this is by no means true for everyone. In fact there is a lot you can do to reduce your risk.

- > Genetic predisposition: some families will carry the 'breast cancer gene', BRCA 1 and 2 are genes that increase the likelihood of someone developing breast cancer
- > Lifestyle: the usual suspects – alcohol and obesity are known risk factors, and smoking may also be a contributing factor. Taking regular exercise for 20 minutes a day reduces the risk
- > Pregnancy – reduces the risk
- > Breast feeding – reduces the risk
- > Hormone treatment: the contraceptive pill and HRT if used for a prolonged period of time (more than 5 years) slightly increases the risk of breast cancer. This risk disappears after stopping the medication.
- > Starting periods at a young age (under 12) and having a late menopause (average age in UK is 53) are risk factors due to prolonged exposure of the breasts to oestrogen.

Information

- > coppafeel.org - brilliant charity started by a woman who developed breast cancer at 23 year of age
- > breastcancer.org - wonderful positive energy charity supporting women on their difficult journey
- > cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/breast-cancer - all the science and information on latest research and treatments
- > nhs.uk/conditions/breast-cancer/ - sound and sensible source of information on all aspects of breast cancer
- > macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/breast-cancer - fantastic source of support and information
- > nationalbreastcancer.org/what-is-brca - good information on the genetics, facts and figures as well as myth busting!
- > preventbreastcancer.org.uk - does what it says on the tin!

