

## COMMON QUESTIONS WOMEN ASK

### *Questions asked by women not eligible for screening*

#### ? *I am 46 can I be screened?*

Not routinely. If you have cause for concern about your breasts, discuss these concerns with your GP. He/she will then, if necessary, refer you to a breast specialist for assessment.

### *Questions asked by women eligible for routine screening*

#### ? *Why screen for Breast Cancer?*

- Breast Cancer is the most common form of cancer among women in England and Wales, with 30,000 new cases diagnosed every year.
- One in 9 women in the UK will develop Breast Cancer
- It accounts for one fifth of all female cancer deaths
- Screening is performed by means of a special X-ray called a "mammogram". This test is the best way of detecting breast lumps even before the most experienced surgeon can feel them.
- Early treatment of breast cancer greatly increases the chances of a full recovery.
- By achieving an uptake of 70% and over, it is estimated that the breast screening programme will be on target to reduce the mortality associated with breast cancer by 25%, (i.e. save 1,250 lives per year) by the year 2010.

#### ? *How will I be invited?*

An appointment will automatically be sent to you from the screening office as long as you are registered with an NHS doctor. An information leaflet will also be sent with this letter.

#### ? *What if I can't come when invited?*

You can change your appointment by contacting the Screening Office on 01752 431652.

#### ? *Why have I been invited?*

All women aged 50-70 will be invited at some stage in the course of the next three years and every three years thereafter. If you are 47-49 or 71-73 you have been included in the randomised trial.

? *I am 51 and haven't received an invitation yet - why?*

Your first invitation can arrive at any time between your 49<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday, It depends on which doctor you are registered with. The Screening Office should be able to give you an estimate of the when the service will be screening your doctor's practice.

? *I am 55 and haven't had an invitation, why?*

Have you recently moved into the area? Have you recently changed address and not notified your doctor? (Ask the woman to ring the Breast Screening Unit on 01752 431652, and the staff will investigate further.)

? *My next door neighbour has had an invitation, but I haven't. Why not?*

Women are invited practice by practice, rather than street by street. Your neighbour may not be registered with the same doctor as you.

? *I have previously been treated for breast cancer. Does the screening still apply to me?*

YES. Providing it has been over 6 months since your last mammogram. It is an extra and valuable check on your breasts. **However, if you are still under care and have annual mammograms, then cancel your screening appointment should you receive one.**

? *Should I examine my own breasts?*

YES. However being breast aware is not an alternative to mammography, which can detect cancers before any lump can be felt. Being breast aware is complementary to mammography.

? *I am disabled and use a wheelchair, how will I be screened?*

Please contact the Breast Unit on 01752 431652 and you will be given a longer appointment time at the static unit at The Guildhall Unit.

? *We have learning disabled ladies in our Care Home will they be screened?*

Providing they are registered with a GP they will receive an invitation. Some learning disabled women are more than happy to be screened on the static unit, however some ladies may require a longer appointment time. Please ring the Breast Unit on 01752 431652 and discuss this with us.

? *I am blind and need the help of my guide dog can I still be screened?*

It is perfectly acceptable to bring your guide dog. If you feel that the mobile van is difficult for you, please contact the Breast Unit on 01752 431652 to book an appointment at the static unit.

? *I do not want to be screened, please do not invite me*

You will need to notify the Breast Unit (preferably in writing), so that they can send you a Withdrawal Form for you to complete and return.

? *I have just moved into the area, and it is almost three years since my last screen*

Every three months, the Programme calls for all those women who have moved into the area, or changed their GP practice. Please advise the women to call the Breast Unit for further information.

## Questions about screening

### ? *I am not sure about X-rays, is it safe to be screened?*

The radiation dose you receive when you have a mammogram is very small. The benefit of being screened at your age far outweighs any risk of harm from the x-ray.

### ? *How often will I be screened?*

At present the policy is to screen at least every three years. Most of the research to date has shown that shorter intervals would not necessarily be of any benefit. However, it is important that you know how to be "breast aware" and check your own breast in the interval between screens.

### ? *What is Mammography?*

It is a very low dose x-ray technique specially developed for taking pictures of the breasts.

## Questions about the procedure

### ? *Does it hurt?*

Because your breasts are compressed quite tightly for a few seconds during the procedure, you might find it uncomfortable. A very small percentage of women do find it painful. If you get sore and tender breasts, particularly when your period is due, you could change your appointment to a different time of the month, or take the sort of painkiller you would normally use for a headache before attending.

### ? *How long does it take?*

The actual procedure itself only takes a few minutes, but you should allow about half an hour from start to finish.

### ? *Are the staff who do the screening all women?*

Yes - for the first stage. If you were recalled for second-stage screening ("Assessment"), you may see other staff who could be male or female e.g. a male breast specialist doctor.

### ? *Is there anything I need to do before going?*

Wear suitable clothes, as you will need to undress your top half. Avoid using talcum powder, body oils and spray deodorant.

## Questions about the results

### ? *How soon do I get the results?*

The majority of women will receive the results within a fortnight (10 working days). Your result will come directly to you in the post and a copy will also go to your doctor.

### ? *What are the possible results?*

- Normal - in which case you will be routinely recalled in three years time, provided you are still under 70.
- Second Stage Screening - in which case you will be referred to an Assessment Centre for further investigation. This does not mean you have cancer.
- Technical Repeat - for technical reasons only, some screens need to be repeated before they can be classified as "normal" or "referred for second stage screening". In most cases, women will be asked to go to the Mobile Unit for their repeat screen. The films are then reported in the normal manner.

## Questions about Second Stage Screening / Assessment

### ? *How many screened women are recalled?*

Approximately 7%

### ? *What happens at the Assessment Centre?*

A clinical examination will be carried out and more sophisticated mammograms will be taken. Other diagnostic techniques may be employed if necessary. Breast Care Nurses will also be available to discuss any concerns you may have. The majority of women will receive their results on that day. However, some women may require a needle biopsy, the result of which will be available at a further appointment, which normally takes one week.

### ? *I have been asked to come back to the "Assessment Clinic", does this mean I have got cancer?*

Sometimes the first mammograms do not give us enough information. Screening is the first line of detection. Changes in the breast tissue may be seen, and these require further investigation using more sophisticated mammography. In all cases, women will be asked to come back for further tests at the Breast unit. The majority of women who come back for further tests will NOT have breast cancer, or any other serious condition.

### ? *What sort of treatment will I need if I have Cancer?*

If cancer is detected then all treatment pathways will be fully discussed with you by a specialist Breast Cancer Surgeon and Breast Care Nurse.

## Questions asked about "After Screening"

? *I came for Breast Screening a couple of months ago, and I was all clear. Now I can feel something, what should I do?*

Go to see your own doctor, and he/she will assess if you need to be referred to a breast specialist within the Breast Unit.

? *I have found a lump and I am very worried, can I come for a breast x-ray?*

The best thing would be to arrange to see your doctor or practice nurse, who will assess if you need to see a breast care specialist.

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### West Devon & East Cornwall Breast Screening Unit

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