



Health & Wellness Bulletin

Breast Awareness

According to the Irish Cancer Society, breast cancer is now the second most common cancer in Ireland, affecting over 2,600 women each year. Although uncommon in men, there are approximately 16 men diagnosed with breast cancer every year in Ireland.

Did you know?

- Better treatments mean that more and more people are now living long and full lives after breast cancer. However, the number of cases is rising
- Early diagnosis is key to surviving breast cancer
- Irish women have a 1 in 10 chance of developing breast cancer in their lifetime
- 74% of Irish women with breast cancer discovered the lump themselves
- The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age. Approximately 80% of breast cancers occur in women over 50 years

Becoming Breast Aware

This means knowing what is normal for you. Your breasts will go through many normal changes during life as they are affected by:

- Hormones
- Pregnancy
- Breastfeeding
- Menopause

The 5 point breast awareness code

- Know what is normal for you
- Know what changes to look for
- Look at and feel your breasts
- Discuss any changes with your GP without delay
- Attend for routine breast screening if you are aged between 50 and 64

How do I check my breasts?

- Get into the habit of regularly checking your breasts for changes
- Use a mirror to look for changes so you see the breasts from different angles
- Feel for changes – an easy way to feel for changes is with a soapy hand in the bath or shower. Some women prefer to lie down to check for changes.

What do I need to be aware of?

- A change in size or shape – it may be that one breast has become larger
- Changes in the nipple – in direction or shape, pulled in or flattened nipple
- Changes on or around the nipple – rash, flaky or crusted skin
- Changes in the skin – dimpling, puckering or redness
- ‘Orange peel’ appearance of the skin caused by unusually enlarged pores
- Swelling in your armpit or around your collarbone
- A lump, any size, or thickening in your breast
- Constant pain in one part of your breast or armpit

I've noticed a change, what next?

Contact your GP as soon as possible, they may:

- Reassure you that there is nothing to worry about
- Ask you to come back at a different stage in your menstrual cycle for further examination
- Refer you for further investigations

Remember, most breast changes are harmless and are not cancer. In fact, nine out of ten breast lumps are completely harmless.

Routine breast screening

Breast screening involves a mammogram x-ray of the breasts, which can detect early signs of cancer before it can be seen or felt. BreastCheck, the National Breast Screening Programme, offers free mammograms to women aged 50-64. The programme invites eligible women, for free screening every two years. You can register for BreastCheck by calling freephone **1800 45 45 55**.

Information received from the Irish Cancer Society (www.cancer.ie)