

Breast Screening - Information for carers

All women aged between 47 and 73 years, registered with a GP, are invited once every three years to have a mammogram. Mammograms can spot cancer before a lump can be felt. Doncaster's learning disability nurses are working in partnership with the NHS Breast Screening Service to encourage women with learning disabilities to use this service. We hope this guide will be useful for people who care for them.

Doctor's surgeries give the Breast Screening Service a list of women between the age of 47 and 73 registered with them. The screening office then sends out an invitation letter with a date and time of an appointment.

A diagnostic mammogram can be taken if

- The woman can hold her head up and can hold her arms clear of her chest during the mammogram. If the woman is a wheelchair user and unable to stand, a mammogram is still possible as long as the sides of the wheelchair can be removed for the examination.
 - **She can understand what is going to happen**
The woman must be able to understand what is being asked of her and give her agreement. If she cannot understand what the radiographer is saying sufficiently, extra support is available from the Breast Screening Service or through your local community learning disability team.
 - **The woman is not too anxious in an unfamiliar environment**
To overcome anxiety, the Breast Screening Service is happy to let women see the clinic and the equipment before their actual appointment for a mammogram. Carers will need to think carefully about the timing of the appointment, for example not at a mealtime, and how they can help with preparing the woman and what they will do if the woman becomes anxious.
 - **She can understand and comply with simple requests**
Radiographers will need the woman to follow simple instructions so that the mammogram can be taken. Carers will need to be ready to support radiographers if this is necessary.
 - **She can tolerate people touching her**
In order for the radiographers to make sure they get a clear mammogram picture, they need to support the woman to place her breast into the machine. It can take a few minutes to get the correct position.
 - **She can remain still for a few minutes**
The woman will need to hold a position for a few minutes.
 - **She can tolerate some discomfort**
To take a mammogram picture of the breast tissue, each breast is placed between two pieces of glass and gently compressed. This may be uncomfortable, and some women instinctively try to pull away.
- The woman should**
- wear a separate top and skirt/trousers
 - wear a top that is easy to remove.
- A carer should**
- think about how to support a woman to stay as calm as possible
 - make arrangements for another woman to lend support, help with undressing, etc if you are the main carer and a man.

Breast Screening (continued)

If you feel that a woman you are supporting may have difficulties in having a mammogram, please contact the Breast Screening Unit.

Breast awareness

A small number of breast cancers do not show up on X-ray, so it is important for women to carry out regular self-examination of their breasts, particularly if they are over 50 and/or breast cancer runs in the family.

Please consult a GP if any changes in the breast are noticed.

All women should be encouraged to get to know their own bodies so that they notice changes. Bathing and drying is a good time to do this. For those women with learning disabilities who can do this, they should be shown how to feel and look for changes. If a woman is not able to do this for herself, a carer who provides personal care should do a visual check regularly.

Look for:

- appearance: any change in the outline or shape of the breast, or any puckering or dimpling of the skin
- feelings: any signs of pain or discomfort in the breast when touched or on movement
- lumps: any lumps, thickening or bumpy areas in one breast or armpit, which seem to be different from the same part on the other breast or armpit
- nipple change: any nipple discharge, bleeding or moist reddish areas, which do not heal easily, should be checked. Any change in nipple position - pulled in or pointing differently - or nipple rash should also be checked out by a doctor.

If you have any queries or concerns please contact the Breast Screening Unit. You will find our number on your appointment letter.