

Benefits of breast screening

Screening saves lives

Mammograms help find cancer as early as possible by showing changes inside the breast before anything can be felt. You are more likely to survive breast cancer when cancers are found early and are small.

In New Zealand, people found to have breast cancer following screening are less likely to die from it than those who find breast cancer and are not in the screening programme. Screening has reduced deaths from breast cancer by one third¹.

The majority of people who develop breast cancer have no family history of it. This is why it's important to be aware of any changes to your breasts and to have regular mammograms regardless of your family history. If you do have a family history, you may have a slightly higher risk.

Less treatment

Finding breast cancers early can mean less treatment than if cancer is found later and is more advanced.

A proven method of finding cancer

In women aged 45 to 69, mammograms can find eight or nine out of ten cancers.

It is still important to look for any changes to your breasts between mammograms and talk with your doctor about these immediately.

Risks and harms of breast screening

Some cancers may not harm you

Mammograms can find small breast cancers that would not be found if you were not screened. Some of these cancers might never grow big enough to become life-threatening. This is the case for 10% of cancers found by breast screening and is called overdiagnosis.

Because it is not possible to tell which cancers will become harmful, treatment will be offered for every cancer found. Treatment options can be discussed with your specialist.

¹ [tewhatauora.govt.nz/publications/cohort-and-case-control-analyses-of-breast-cancer-mortality-breastscreen-aotearoa-1999-2011/](https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/publications/cohort-and-case-control-analyses-of-breast-cancer-mortality-breastscreen-aotearoa-1999-2011/)

Mammograms do not find all cancers

A mammogram may look normal even if cancer is somewhere in a breast. In women 45 to 69 years old, about one or two out of ten cancers are not found by mammograms. Finding breast cancers has improved since digital mammograms were introduced. These show more detail than the old photograph (film) mammograms. Because mammograms can miss some cancers, it is important to be aware of any changes to your breasts between mammograms.

If you notice any changes to your breasts that are not normal for you, see your doctor as soon as possible. Do not wait for your mammogram. These changes may not be cancer, but you need to have them checked by your doctor.

Radiation

Like all x-rays, mammograms expose you to a small amount of radiation, but this is unlikely to cause harm. The dose of radiation is smaller with the new digital mammography.

Pain and worry

Breast screening can be uncomfortable or painful for some women as well as worrying. You may bring a support person or member of your family with you if you would like someone with you before and after your mammogram.

Talk with your doctor, nurse or hauora provider about breast screening, and find more information at [TimeToBreastScreen.nz](https://www.TimeToBreastScreen.nz)

FREEPHONE

0800 270 200

Screening for breast cancer

Joining BreastScreen Aotearoa

[TimeToBreastScreen.nz](https://www.TimeToBreastScreen.nz)



BreastScreen
Aotearoa

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government



BreastScreen
Aotearoa

Breast screening and cancer

Breast screening means having a mammogram every 2 years to check for breast cancer, the most common cancer affecting women in New Zealand.

Screening saves lives by finding breast cancers before there are even any symptoms. Most breast cancers are curable if found and treated early before they can grow or spread.

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is a type of x-ray. It is a digital picture that shows the inside of your breast to check for any signs of breast cancer.



During a mammogram, each breast is pressed firmly between two plates for up to a minute so clear pictures can be taken. You will be asked to undress from the waist up and offered a cape or gown to wear.

Mammograms are done at clinics and mobile units throughout New Zealand.

Early detection is your best protection.

What is BreastScreen Aotearoa?

BreastScreen Aotearoa is a free national breast screening programme that checks for signs of breast cancer.

The national programme currently offers free mammograms (breast x-rays) every 2 years to eligible women who have no symptoms of breast cancer.

Joining BreastScreen Aotearoa and booking your mammograms

There are lots of ways to join BreastScreen Aotearoa:

- You can phone us on **0800 270 200**
- You can join online at **TimeToBreastScreen.nz**
- Your doctor or nurse may talk to you about joining.

Am I eligible?

You are eligible to participate in BreastScreen Aotearoa if you:

- are a woman aged 45 to 69
- have no symptoms of breast cancer
- have not had a mammogram in the last 12 months
- are not pregnant or breastfeeding
- are entitled to public health services in New Zealand¹
- have been free of breast cancer for 5 years.

If you are not eligible, talk with your doctor or hauora provider about your personal risk of breast cancer. Also look for any signs of breast cancer and talk with your healthcare provider as soon as possible if you notice changes to your breasts.

¹ For more information on who can receive publicly funded personal health and disability services in New Zealand, visit [tewhatauora.govt.nz/our-health-system/eligibility-for-publicly-funded-health-services/](https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/our-health-system/eligibility-for-publicly-funded-health-services/)

Extending the age for breast screening

BreastScreen Aotearoa is extending the age for free breast screening. This four-year phased rollout is for women aged 70 to 74.

Beginning in Nelson and Marlborough from October 2024, this means women living in this area are now eligible for free breast screening:

- if they turn 70 on or after 1 October 2024
- once they are 74, provided they book their screen before turning 75.

For all other areas, the eligible age range is currently still 45 to 69. The aim is to progressively extend the age range for the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand from October 2025.

Visit **TimeToBreastScreen.nz** or freephone **0800 270 200** to find out more about these changes.

It's your choice

You can choose whether to participate in BreastScreen Aotearoa. You can ask to opt out of the programme at any time. You can also ask to rejoin at any time.

If you decide not to participate in the programme, you or your healthcare provider can still arrange your mammograms, but they may not be free and results will not be recorded with BSA.

To help you decide, more information is provided in this brochure and online at **TimeToBreastScreen.nz**. You can also talk with your doctor, nurse or hauora provider or freephone **0800 270 200**.

If you need support to arrange or attend appointments, help is available from Māori and Pacific providers in some areas. Find out about **Screening Support Services** at info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/cancer-screening/screening-support-services-in-aotearoa-new-zealand