

Breast cancer in men

We think of breast cancer as a disease of women because it is usually women who are affected. However, breast cancer can develop occasionally in men too. Men who are not aware of this may not consider cancer as a possibility, so they might delay seeing their doctor if they develop a breast lump. Whatever your gender, it is very important to see a doctor as soon as possible if you develop a lump in your breast.

What is breast cancer?

Cancer is a condition where cells multiply abnormally, affecting and distorting nearby body structures. In breast cancer this abnormality starts in breast tissue. It most commonly affects women. You can read more in the separate leaflets called [Cancer](#) and [Breast Cancer](#).

Can men get breast cancer?

Yes they can. Men have some breast tissue just like women. However, men only have a small amount of actual breast tissue and cancer in men is much less common than it is in women.

How common is breast cancer in men?

In the UK about 390 men are diagnosed each year with breast cancer. About 54,800 women are diagnosed each year. This means about 140 times as many women as men get breast cancer. So, in men, it is a rare condition.

Why do men get breast cancer?

Men can get cancer of the breast because they have a small amount of breast tissue which can then become cancerous. Certain things can make the condition more likely, such as:

- **Age.** Breast cancer in men tends to develop in older men, usually between the ages of 60 and 70.
- **Family history.** Some breast cancers are caused by a flawed gene. The main gene which can cause men to be more at risk of breast cancer is the BRCA2 gene. If two or more of your close family have developed breast cancer, particularly if they had it under the age of 50, you may also be at risk of breast cancer. If a close family member developed breast cancer under the age of 40, a flawed gene might have been the cause. It may be possible for family members to have blood tests to check for this gene if their family history is strong.
- **High oestrogen levels.** Oestrogen is a female hormone and conditions in men which raise their oestrogen levels can make them more likely to develop breast cancer. Examples of conditions which raise oestrogen levels include [Klinefelter's syndrome](#) and [cirrhosis of the liver](#). Being [very overweight](#) can also result in higher oestrogen levels.
- **Exposure to radiation in the past.** Previous exposure to radiation can increase the risk of cancer.

What are the symptoms of breast cancer in men?

Just as it is in women, the most common symptom is finding a lump. Usually the lump is painless. Breast lumps in men are just as important to get checked as they are in women. Lumps are more likely to have other causes than to be cancer – but **always** see the doctor to find the cause.

Other possible symptoms include:

- A change in shape or size of the breast.
- A leakage of fluid or blood from the nipple.
- A change in shape or form of the nipple (eg, turning inwards instead of pointing outwards) or a rash around it.
- A puckering of the skin of the breast.
- [Lumps \(swollen lymph glands\)](#) in your armpit.

What tests are needed?

If you or your doctor find a lump in your breast, you would be referred to a specialist breast clinic for further tests. Your breast will be examined by the specialist and then you may have one or more of the following investigations:

- An [ultrasound scan](#).
- A [mammogram](#).
- A [magnetic resonance imaging \(MRI\) scan](#).
- A [biopsy](#) - where a sample is drawn from the lump with a thin needle to be examined closely under a microscope.

Tests can conclude whether you have cancer or not. If cancer is found, it may be one of the following types:

- Cancer of the breast tissue - the most common type.
- Cancer of the lining of the tubes (ducts) within the breast, which has not spread to the breast tissue (ductal carcinoma in situ - DCIS).
- Inflammatory breast cancer. This is a rare type of breast cancer. The breast may be warm or red.
- Paget's disease of the breast. This is a rare skin condition affecting the skin around the nipple.

Further tests may be needed to determine what stage your cancer has reached. This is important in order to plan treatment and to give you an idea of the outlook for your particular case. [See the separate leaflet called Stages of Cancer](#).

What is the treatment for breast cancer in men?

This will depend on the type of cancer and the stage it has reached. Treatment options are very similar to those for women. [They are set out in detail in the separate leaflet called Breast Cancer](#). Options include an operation, [radiotherapy](#), [chemotherapy](#) and treatment with medicines such as hormones or therapies which target the cancer cells. Often several of these treatments are needed to get rid of the cancer and to stop it returning.

What is the outlook?

The outlook (prognosis) very much depends on the type of cancer and how far it has spread by the time it is diagnosed. Your specialist will be able to give you an idea of the possible outlook in your personal case.

Can breast cancer in men be prevented?

Because breast cancer in men is so rare, breast screening programmes do not include men. Men with a very strong family history of breast cancer may be advised to have tests for the flawed gene which may put them at risk. For example, if a close male relative has breast cancer, or if the BRCA2 gene has been found in close family members. However, even if you are found to have this gene, it does not mean you will necessarily develop breast cancer. You may, however, be advised to have regular check-ups. There is no standard guidance to follow as breast cancer in men is so unusual.

The cause of cancer for most people is not known, so the best way to avoid problems is to [keep your weight within a healthy range](#) and to report any changes in your breasts to your doctor as soon as possible.

Further reading

- [Early and locally advanced breast cancer](#), NICE Clinical Guideline (February 2009)
- [Breast cancer in men](#); Cancer Research UK
- [Breast cancer incidence in males](#); Cancer Research UK

- [Familial breast cancer: classification, care and managing breast cancer and related risks in people with a family history of breast cancer](#); NICE Clinical Guideline (June 2013 – last updated November 2023).
- [Breast cancer – managing FH](#); NICE CKS, December 2018 (UK access only).
- [Block WD, Muradali D](#); Breast cancer in men. CMAJ. 2013 Oct 1;185(14):1247. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.122056. Epub 2013 May 6.
- [Sanguinetti A, Polistena A, Lucchini R, et al](#); Male breast cancer, clinical presentation, diagnosis and treatment: Twenty years of experience in our Breast Unit. Int J Surg Case Rep. 2016;20S:8–11. doi: 10.1016/j.ijscr.2016.02.004. Epub 2016 Feb 26.
- [Onami S, Ozaki M, Mortimer JE, et al](#); Male breast cancer: an update in diagnosis, treatment and molecular profiling. Maturitas. 2010 Apr;65(4):308–14. doi: 10.1016/j.maturitas.2010.01.012. Epub 2010 Feb 6.
- [Male breast cancer treatment](#); National Cancer Institute

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