



# BREAST AWARENESS & PAP SMEAR

Australian women have access to high quality national screening programs for breast and cervical cancers. Since their introduction, there has been a significant reduction in illness and death. Regular screening saves lives.

**Remember:** early detection is the best protection. So women between 18 and 70 should have a Pap smear every two years and those over 50 should have a mammogram every two years.

## Breast cancer

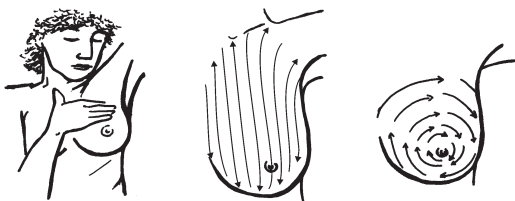
It is important that breast cancer is detected as early as possible as early detection gives a better chance of successful treatment and recovery. There are three things women should do:

- Check their breasts regularly for any unusual changes
- Have a doctor check their breasts about once a year, if they are over 30 years of age
- Have a screening mammogram every two years if they are over 50 years of age.

- Nipple changes
- Change in size/shape of breast.

See a doctor straight away if any changes are noticed. The majority of these changes are not breast cancer, but it is important that all breast symptoms are carefully investigated.

The risk of getting breast cancer increases as women get older.



## Breast awareness

Every woman should be familiar with her own breasts – knowing what is 'normal' is important. If they are familiar with the normal changes in their breasts, they will be better able to identify changes that are not usual for them. All women should do a breast self examination once a month, preferably just after a period.

Changes to look for include:

- Lumps, lumpiness or thickening (even if painless)
- Discharge
- Skin changes on the breast – puckering, dimpling, redness

## BreastScreen (mammogram)

The most effective method for detecting breast cancer is a breast X-ray called a mammogram. A mammogram provides a picture of the inside of the breast. It can detect early breast changes that may be breast cancer, even where there are no symptoms. **All women over 50 should have a mammogram every two years.**

BreastScreen in each state offers free mammography screening for women over 50 who have no symptoms of breast cancer.

A doctor can arrange a mammogram or women can go to BreastScreen in their area – no referral is needed. After the first mammogram, the woman's name will be placed on a register so that she can receive a reminder when the next mammogram is due.

For more information or to arrange an appointment, phone 13 20 50.

## Important

- If you discover any breast changes that are not normal for you it is important to see your doctor straight away.
- The majority of women who find a breast change will be relieved to know that is not breast cancer.

## Cervical screening

Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable of all cancers. Since the national screening program started, there has been a 40% reduction in deaths. The biggest risk factor for cervical cancer is not having a Pap smear every two years.

### What is a Pap smear?

A Pap smear is a quick and simple test to check for any changes in cervical cells that could develop into cancer, if not treated. A number of cells are collected from the cervix and sent to a laboratory where they are tested for anything unusual. No drugs or anaesthetic are required and a doctor or women's health nurse can easily do it. It only takes a few minutes, but it may save a life.

Most women do not find the Pap test painful, but it sometimes can be uncomfortable. If it does hurt, tell a doctor or women's health nurse straight away.

A Pap smear every two years can help prevent 90% of cervical cancer.

### Who should have a Pap smear?

All women who have ever been sexually active should start to have Pap smears one or two years after their first sexual experience until they are 69 years of age.

Routine screening should be carried out every TWO years in women who have no symptoms or history that suggests cervical cancer.

### Abnormal Pap smear results

Most Pap tests are normal. A small number show changes in the cells of the cervix, but most of these changes are minor infections which can be easily treated or clear up naturally. In a very small number of cases, the changes may develop to cervical cancer. When detected early by a Pap test, these changes can be treated and cured. **That is why having a Pap test every two years is so important.**

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- For those women whose changes are due to breast cancer, the sooner the diagnosis is made the better the chance of effective treatment and the more treatment choices.

### To help women remember

A doctor or health clinic may have a system to remind women when it is time for their next Pap smear. States and territories have Pap Smear Registries, which keep a confidential record of Pap smear results and provide a valuable, voluntary and confidential backup system. Registries act as a reminder service when a woman is overdue for a Pap smear and as a safety net if they have an abnormal Pap smear result which has not been followed up.

Women who do not want information recorded on the registry should tell the doctor.

## Self care

- Once over the age of 50, have a mammogram every two years
- Have a doctor examine your breasts once a year
- Be aware of normal changes in your breasts, so you can identify any unusual changes
- See your doctor immediately if you notice any unusual changes
- Have a pap smear every two years, from one or two years after your first sexual experience until you are 69 years of age
- See your doctor immediately if you notice any unusual bleeding or discharge from your vagina
- Ensure your details are up-to-date on the Pap Smear Registry so you get reminders of when you are due for your next pap smear.

## Contact

**BreastScreen Australia** – National breast screening program. Information and appointments – ph. 13 20 50

**Cervical Screen** – Information – ph. 13 15 56 or visit [www.cervicalscreen.health.gov.au](http://www.cervicalscreen.health.gov.au)

**Breast Cancer Network of Australia** – ph. 1800 500 258

**Breast Health Link** – visit [www.breasthealthlink.com](http://www.breasthealthlink.com)

**Family Planning Association** – listed under 'F' in the white pages of the phone book

**A doctor** – listed under 'Medical Practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book

**A Self Care pharmacy** – to locate telephone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

*Pharmacy Self Care has a strong commitment to providing current and reliable health information.  
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