

# Breast implants and breast screening



*Cancer Screening Programmes*

Breast screening by mammography (breast x-rays) can detect cancer at a very early stage. Breast screening has been shown to reduce the number of deaths from breast cancer.

However, mammography can be less effective in women who have breast implants. This is because the x-rays cannot 'see' through the implant to the breast tissue behind it.

**It is important that you tell the radiographer carrying out your screening if you have breast implants.**

She may need to use a slightly different technique, so that as much breast tissue as possible can be shown on the x-ray.

Screening does not check on your implants. If you think you have a problem with one or both implants, please mention this before you are screened. Mammography might not be appropriate.

Currently, we recommend that women with implants go for screening at a main screening unit, rather than a mobile unit. This is so that your x-rays can be checked as soon as they are taken. If you are offered a screening appointment at a mobile unit, please ring and check to see if your appointment needs to be changed. The contact number will be on your appointment letter.

Taking the breast x-rays involves pressing the breast between two special plates on the x-ray machine. It is very unlikely to harm your implants, but if you are concerned, you can discuss this with the woman taking your mammograms.



If you have had a total mastectomy, or a breast reconstruction with a breast implant, then mammography is not needed. This is because all the breast tissue will have been removed. If you have only had a total mastectomy on one side, then your other breast can still be x-rayed.

All women, with or without implants, should be breast aware. This means knowing how your breasts look and feel, and reporting any changes to your GP as soon as possible.

The Department of Health has a five-point code for breast awareness:

- 1 You should know what is normal for you
- 2 Know what changes to look for
- 3 Look and feel
- 4 Tell your GP about any changes straightaway
- 5 Go for breast screening when invited

For more information about breast screening, you can:

- **Speak** to your GP
- **Contact** your local NHS Breast Screening Unit
- **Read** our leaflets 'NHS breast screening', and 'Be breast aware'. Both are available on the NHS Cancer Screening Programmes website [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk)



For more copies of this leaflet contact  
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