

Breast Cancer Facts

Every 3 hours a woman in Ireland is diagnosed with breast cancer. Breast cancer is the second most common cancer in women after skin cancer. More than 2000 new cases of breast cancer are diagnosed in Ireland each year. Irish women have a 1 in 12 chance of developing breast cancer in their lifetime. Only about five to ten per cent of breast cancers are believed to have a family link. The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age. Approximately 80% of breast cancers occur in women over 50 years. Around 14 men develop breast cancer in Ireland each year. Breast Cancer is the second most common cancer in Ireland. Early diagnosis is a key to surviving breast cancer. If you do notice any change in your breasts, see your GP as soon as possible. 9 out of 10 suspicious lumps are not cancerous. Many women over 40 have calcium deposits (calcifications) in their breasts, and most of them are benign. Pain isn't usually a sign of breast cancer. If you have pain in one or both breasts, rest assured it's probably due to hormonal changes, a benign cyst, a ligament strain or another condition; however it is important to get unexplained pain checked by your GP. Don't worry that you may be making an unnecessary fuss. More common warning signs of breast cancer include a palpable lump, a change in the size or shape of the breast, puckering of the skin, nipple changes (like scaling or discharge), or increased warmth. A mammogram (X-ray of the breast) is the most common way to check for breast cancer. 80.6% of all women diagnosed with breast cancer survive for 5 years or longer; early detection is the key to survival.

Importance of self-checks

Self-checks are vitally important; 74% of Irish women with breast cancer discovered the lump themselves. It's good to do them at the same time every month. What self-exams do is help you become familiar with what's "normal" for your breasts. So when something's off, you'll know and can bring it to your doctor's attention. After all, you know your body better than any doctor does.

What happens if my GP sends me for a breast check?

Your GP will refer you to a specialist breast clinic in a hospital if he/she has any concern about your symptoms; for example if you have a lump in your breast. At the hospital, you may have triple assessment. Triple assessment uses three ways used to assess your breasts. It starts with the doctor taking a medical history or list of any health problems you have had in the past and then examining your breasts and underarms. Next you may be sent on to the X-ray department for the next step which may be a mammogram (x-ray of the breast) or an Ultrasound scan or both. Finally a biopsy which may be a fine needle test or core biopsy. If you do not have a lump you may not need full triple assessment.

BreastCheck Screening Programme

BreastCheck is a programme funded by the Government which provides breast screening and allows women aged 50 to 64 to get a free mammogram on an area-by-area manner every two years. BreastCheck reduces deaths from breast cancer by finding and treating the disease at an early stage. BreastCheck invites women aged 50 to 64 for a free mammogram on an area by area basis every two years. In order to be able to invite women in the 50 to 64 age group, BreastCheck has a register of women eligible for screening but there are times when your details could be missed. If you haven't got an invitation you can register for BreastCheck by calling freephone 1800 45 45 55. The Breast Check website (www.breastcheck.ie) has details of screening locations in your area. Breast Check screenings are life-saving so don't delay getting yours

Some quick tips on Breast Cancer Prevention

Active women are less likely to develop and die from breast cancer. A Recent American study suggests that women with high aerobic fitness levels have a 55% lower chance of dying from breast cancer than their less-fit peers. So get moving! Having two or more drinks a day increases breast cancer risk by about 25%. Embrace a diet high in vegetables and fruit and low in sugared drinks, refined carbohydrates and fatty foods. Stop smoking, smoking is associated with increased risk of breast cancer in some women. Being overweight, especially after menopause increases your breast cancer risk. So if you're overweight, you have higher amounts of circulating oestrogen, which could stimulate breast cancer growth. Even losing a few pounds can reduce your risk significantly. Breast-feed your babies for as long as possible. Women who breast-feed their babies for at least a year in total have a reduced risk of developing breast cancer later. For more information, call the National Cancer Helpline at 1800 200 700 (Monday to Friday)

Prosthesis and bra fitting in Mullingar

Some women who choose a mastectomy (removal of the breast) decide on reconstructive surgery after a mastectomy, but many choose breast prosthesis. Many women do not realise their full entitlements in relation to prostheses and fitting. All women in Ireland who have undergone breast cancer surgery are entitled to their first prosthesis and two bras free of charge. Medical Card holders are entitled to further free prosthesis and bra fitting. Many Health Insurance policies have entitlements for prosthesis and bra fitting. LARCC is the local provider of prostheses and bra fitting after breast surgery and they provide a special fitting service in Multyfarnham and have recently extended this service to Mullingar by offering a monthly clinic in Whelehan's pharmacy in Mullingar. Call LARCC at 1890 719 719 for more information and to find out your entitlements.

For comprehensive and free health advice and information call in to Whelehans or log on to www.whelehans.ie or dial 04493 34591.