Raising awareness, saving lives.
Breast cancer and women over 70

Barnsley | Bassetlaw | North Derbyshire | Doncaster | Rotherham | Sheffield
Detecting breast cancer early significantly improves the chances of successful treatment. Raising awareness saves lives.

Whether you’re a volunteer, a community worker or a healthcare professional – this booklet is designed to help you pass on information about spotting and treating breast cancer to the women you meet every day.

It features information on the signs and symptoms, the importance of screening programmes, and of seeking medical attention immediately if they notice changes in their breasts.

Evidence shows that a quick chat can have a lasting effect on someone’s awareness of breast cancer. And because you are in contact with older women on a regular basis, you are in an excellent position to have that five-minute conversation. This approach is much more effective than just relying on leaflets, and could mean that they:

- remember to **check** their breasts regularly;
- make an **appointment** for a breast screen; and
- **see their doctor** if they notice any changes in their breasts.
Our ultimate aim is to raise awareness of breast cancer among women aged over 70, so that they are in a better position to get an early diagnosis, and so live a longer and healthier life.

The key messages we want to pass on to older women are that:

- the likelihood of developing breast cancer **increases with age**;
- there are **several symptoms** they should regularly check for;
- **they should not delay seeing their GP** if they notice these symptoms (they will not be wasting their doctor’s time);
- they are still **entitled to make a breast screening appointment**, even if they’re over 73; and
- **the earlier cancer is diagnosed, the better**.

**Notes:**

When you spend time with women who are over 70, try to find an opportunity to talk to them about breast cancer awareness. For example, you could:

- **hand out leaflets** as a conversation starter, helping them understand what to check for and why;
- **ask** them when they last had a breast screen and give them the number to make an appointment screening appointment;
- **encourage them to see their GP** as soon as possible if they have noticed an unusual change in their breast so they can undergo tests (and reassure them that many breast symptoms are not cancerous);
- ask a younger person to **pass information on** to their mother or older relative;
- **give a presentation or informal talk** to a local community group or colleagues (a presentation is downloadable from North Trent Cancer Network – see Resources on page 13); and
- **put up posters or display leaflets** where you work, in community venues or in public places.

You don’t need to be a breast cancer expert, but a little information will help you speak with confidence and clarity about the subject.
• The **risk of developing breast cancer increase with age**. 80% (four out of five) of cases occur in women over 50.

• Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK for women and the number of cases has increased steadily to nearly 48,000 cases a year.

• **Breast cancer accounts for one in three of all cancers** in women in the UK.

• **One in eight women will develop breast cancer** in their lifetime.

• **Survival rates are also improving**, thanks to better awareness, better screening and better treatment.

• **More than 80% (four out of five) of women will survive** for at least five years after their diagnosis.

• In the North Trent area, all women aged between 47 and 73 are invited for breast screening every three years. **Older women can still be screened** but need to make their own appointment.

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**Facts and figures Breast cancer and women over 70**

- In the UK, one in three of all breast cancer cases are diagnosed in women over 70. However, the same age group accounts for half the total number of deaths.

- One in five older women with breast cancer seek medical help for the first time when it is already an emergency.

- The five-year survival rate from breast cancer decreases with age:
  - **80% for women younger than 70**
  - **66% for women 70–79**
  - **47% for women 80–89**

- One in three women over 70 do not check their breasts regularly (monthly).

- Only one in three women over 70 would contact their doctor within a week of noticing a change.

- Breast symptoms in older women are more likely to be cancerous than those in younger women (one in three older women compared to one in 10 younger women).
The importance of breast cancer awareness

Research shows that breast awareness among women over 70 is low compared to younger women. This means that older women risk being diagnosed at a later stage, which results in fewer treatment options and a greater risk that the cancer has spread to other organs in the body.

These are some of the most common myths held by older women that we want to overcome through better breast awareness:

Myth: Having a family history is the biggest risk for breast cancer. Women without a family history are at low risk.
Fact: Most breast cancers do not run in families (only one or two in 20 cases have a strong genetic link).
Advice: Women with a close relative (mother or sister) who had cancer when they were younger than 50 should speak to their GP about possible risks.

Myth: Older women are at lower risk because they are not called for screening.
Fact: Getting older is one of the main risk factors, and one in three of all breast cancer cases occur in women over 70.
Advice: Women over the age of 73 are still entitled to breast screening and should continue to be screened. They need to make their own appointment directly with their nearest breast screening centre every three years.

Myth: Women from more affluent backgrounds are at lower risk due to their healthier lifestyles.
Fact: The incidence of breast cancer is actually higher among more affluent women. This may be linked to women having children later in life, having fewer children, their higher uptake of screening and their alcohol intake.
However, the chances of dying are higher among women from particular backgrounds: lower social economic groups, ethnic minority communities, women living in care homes, women with disabilities, older women and single women.
Advice: All women regardless of background should be breast aware.

Myth: Women will be wasting their doctor’s time if they notice a change in their breasts and make an appointment.
Fact: It is the doctor’s job to investigate symptoms and refer a patient to hospital if necessary.
Advice: NHS advice will always be to see your GP immediately if you notice changes in your breasts. Detecting cancer early saves lives.
Most cases of breast cancer are found by women noticing unusual changes in their bodies, taking the initiative and making an appointment to see their doctor. The earlier breast cancer is found, the better the chance of beating it, which is why regular checks are so important.

Being ‘breast aware’ simply means knowing what your breasts look and feel like normally, and getting them checked out by your doctor if you notice any unusual changes. Lumps are a well-known symptom but there are other important signs to look out for too (see page 12).

Reducing the risk

It’s very difficult to define exactly what causes breast cancer. However, statistics show that older women are at a higher risk and there is evidence that some genes contribute to the disease.

Nonetheless, four out of every ten cancers are preventable, and women can reduce their risk by leading a healthy lifestyle. This could mean:

- drinking less alcohol
- maintaining a healthy weight
- staying physically active

Walking to the shops, climbing a staircase or doing some gardening are all physical activities.

Further information is available online (see Resources on page 13).

Older women and breast checking

Only one in three older women regularly check their breasts, and the main reason they don’t is that they forget. Finding ways to help them remember is crucial.

Everyone checks their breasts in a different way, but it’s good to encourage women to check their bodies when they are relaxed – maybe after a bath or shower – and ideally in front of a mirror.

You could recommend Breakthrough Breast Cancer’s TLC approach:

- **Touch** – do you feel anything different?
- **Look** – can you see any changes in shape, size or texture?
- **Check** anything unusual with your doctor.

Breast Screening

Women are invited for a mammogram (breast x-ray) every three years from the age of 47 to 73. You have to be registered with a GP to be sent an appointment.

Women over 73 will not be sent an invitation but can request an appointment every 3 years as they are still at risk.

Mammograms can pick up breast changes even before symptoms appear. Breast cancer can also develop between mammograms so women should still check their breasts regularly and report any changes to their doctor.
Most women know that a lump could be a sign of breast cancer. But there are other signs that many women are not aware of. They include:

- a thickening in the breast or armpit;
- changes in the size, shape or position of the nipple;
- changes in the skin, i.e. puckering, redness, dimpling or hardening;
- change in the size or shape of a breast;
- pain in the breast or armpit; and
- any other change that is unusual.

Sometimes, there are no obvious signs and symptoms, and only breast screening can detect changes in the cells.
This guide should give you all the information you need to confidently talk about breast cancer awareness to women over 70.

**Spreading the message**

The most effective way to spread the word about breast cancer awareness is **face to face**. A five-minute chat can have a lasting effect on someone. **Try talking to friends and family first, and then people you work with.** We’re trying to reach women over 70 so always encourage the people you talk with to tell their relatives, neighbours and friends too.

**Resources**

North Trent Cancer Network (www.northtrentcancernetwork.nhs.uk/) has more resources to help you spread the breast cancer awareness message, including leaflets and downloadable presentations – these include PowerPoint slides and a ready-made talk that can be used for small informal groups.

There is more detailed information online. The two main breast cancer charities are:

- Breast Cancer Care: www.breastcancercare.org.uk
- Breakthrough Breast Cancer: www.breakthrough.org.uk
- NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk
- NHS Direct: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/

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**Doncaster and Bassetlaw**

**Macmillan Cancer Information Support**
Tel: 01777 863282

**St John’s Information and Support Centre**
Weston Road
Balby
Doncaster
DN4 8JS
Tel: 01302 796853

**Doncaster & Bassetlaw Breast Screening Unit**
Cameo Centre, Chequer Road Clinic
Chequer Road
Doncaster
DN1 2AD
Tel: 01302 320112

**Sheffield Breast Screening Centre**
Floor C, Out-Patients Hallamshire Hospital
Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2TX
Tel: 01142 711922

**Rotherham Macmillan Cancer Information & Support Centre**
Earl of Scarborough Suite Level C, Rotherham Foundation
Trust Hospital
Moorgate Road
Rotherham
S60 2UD
Tel: 01709 427659

**Rotherham Breast Screening Centre**
Level C, Rotherham Foundation
Trust Hospital
Moorgate Road
Rotherham
S60 2UD
Tel: 01709 304807

**Barnsley Healthwise Cancer Mobile Information Unit**
(based at Barnsley District General Hospital)
Tel: 01226 433979
Email: Bdgh-tr.healthwise@nhs.net

**Barnsley Breast Screening Unit**
Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Gawber Road
Barnsley
South Yorkshire
S75 2PS
Tel: 01226 432100

**Chesterfield (N. Derbyshire) Breast Screening Service**
Breast Screening Unit
Chesterfield Royal Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust
Calow
Chesterfield
S44 5BL
Tel: 01246 513056

**Chesterfield Cancer Drop-In Centre**
3rd Floor, Dents Chambers
New Square
Chesterfield
Tel: 01246 555514
Key messages

Everyone can play a part in raising breast cancer awareness. Pass this information on today and help save lives.

1 in 3 women diagnosed with breast cancer are aged over 70

The risk of breast cancer increases with age

1 in 5 older women with breast cancer present as an emergency (that is; the cancer is already developed)

Women over 70 can still request breast screening even if they are not routinely invited.

Unclear on anything? Visit northtrentcancernetwork.nhs.uk/

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