

# Family history of breast cancer and screening



BreastScreen  
Victoria

Caring about Women

This fact sheet provides information about what a family history of breast and ovarian cancer means. It also describes how BreastScreen Victoria uses your family history information to provide you with better care.

## What are the risk factors for breast cancer?

Breast cancer is common. **1 in 8** women in Victoria will develop breast cancer in their lifetime.



**Getting older** is the biggest risk factor. Most women who get breast cancer are **over 50**.



A family history of breast or ovarian cancer is also an important risk factor



## What is a family history of breast and ovarian cancer?

You have a family history if any of your blood relatives have had breast or ovarian cancer.




### Why does a family history matter?

Breast cancer is common and most breast cancers are not caused by genetic factors. Therefore most women's family history of breast cancer is due to chance alone. For a small number of women with a family history, this may be due to a gene change in a blood relative that increases the risk of cancer.

Understanding your family history of breast cancer can help to identify your risk:



### Of 100 women:

-  95 women are at average risk (population risk) of developing breast cancer.
-  Only four women are at a moderately increased risk of developing breast cancer.
-  Only one woman is at a potentially high risk of developing breast cancer based on her family history.

## When a family history is important?

Your family history becomes more important when:

- **More than one relative** on the same side of your family (mother's or father's side) has been diagnosed with breast cancer
- Relatives are diagnosed with breast cancer **at a young age** (under 50 years of age) and closer to you (for example your sister, rather than your cousin)
- If a family member has breast cancer in **both breasts**
- **Male** breast cancer
- Both breast and **ovarian** cancer exists in your family.

## Reassuring facts for women with a family history

- Most breast cancers are not caused by genetic factors
- The earlier a cancer is detected, the greater the likelihood of successful treatment.
- Having a family history doesn't mean you will develop breast cancer.

## What screening do I need?

This table shows the different breast cancer risk levels, and recommended screening. Women will be sent a reminder letter to book their next appointment.

Risk level	Average risk	Moderately increased risk	Potentially high risk
	Risk is similar to other women the same age. Women of this risk level have a <b>1 in 8</b> or lower chance of developing breast cancer.	Women of this risk level have between a <b>1 in 8 and 1 in 4</b> chance of developing breast cancer by the age of 75	Women of this risk level have over <b>1 in 4</b> chance of developing breast cancer by the age of 75 These women need different care and services that are not part of screening. We recommend they <b>see their doctor for a clinical assessment and referral</b> to a specialised clinic. <b>If</b> woman decides to continue screening with BreastScreen Victoria:
Screening recommended	<b>50-74 years</b> Screen every 2 years	<b>40-49 years</b> Screen every year <b>50-74 years</b> Screen every 2 years	<b>40-59 years</b> Screen every year <b>60-74 years</b> Screen every 2 years

## How does BreastScreen Victoria assess my risk?

BreastScreen Victoria collects information about women's family history so we can provide them with better care.

When a woman books her screening appointment she is asked questions about her family history of **breast and ovarian** cancer.

We use this information to estimate her personal level of risk of developing breast cancer.

Women who may be at higher than average risk, will be told what this means for them and what they should do next. Women who report family history but are at average risk, will be told this in their result letter.

## What should I do?

If you are concerned about your family history of breast cancer, we recommend you discuss your individual circumstances with your doctor.

BreastScreen Victoria estimates a woman's level of risk based on the information she provides us about her family history of breast and ovarian cancer. There are **other risk factors** for breast cancer that may decrease or increase a woman's level of risk.

Your doctor can use a familial risk assessment tool to provide a more complete assessment of your breast cancer risk. If there are any new cases of breast cancer diagnosed in your family it is important that you inform both BreastScreen Victoria and your doctor.

## Be breast aware

Whether or not you have regular breast screens, it is important to be breast aware because breast cancer can develop at any time.

We recommend you get to know the normal look and feel of your breasts and see your doctor if you notice any unusual changes, such as lumps, pain or nipple discharge.

## Further information

[breastscreen.org.au/familyhistory](http://breastscreen.org.au/familyhistory)

Phone: 13 20 50

Email: [familyhistory@breastscreen.org.au](mailto:familyhistory@breastscreen.org.au)

## Other useful links

Cancer Council Information and Support Service: 13 11 20 (13 14 50 for other languages)

Cancer Council Victoria: [cancervic.org.au](http://cancervic.org.au)

Cancer Australia: [canceraustralia.gov.au](http://canceraustralia.gov.au)

## Book at [breastscreen.org.au](http://breastscreen.org.au) or call 13 20 50



For more information or to change your details, visit [breastscreen.org.au](http://breastscreen.org.au) or call 13 20 50



For interpreter assistance call 13 14 50



Translated information: [breastscreen.org.au/translations](http://breastscreen.org.au/translations)

TTY 13 36 77 if you have hearing or speech difficulties



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