

Breast cancer

What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer develops when some of the cells in the breast start to grow out of control. When this happens, a cancerous growth begins to appear somewhere inside the breast.

Most breast cancers begin in the lining of the ducts though a small number start in the milk sacs. If not treated, cancer cells from the breast can spread to other parts of the body.

There are about ten different kinds of breast cancer. Some grow slowly while others develop faster.

What causes breast cancer?

The causes of breast cancer are unknown. Factors that are known to increase the chance of developing breast cancer include:

- being older. More than half the women who are diagnosed with breast cancer are over 65.
- having a close relative, like a mother, sister or daughter (or more than one) - who was diagnosed with breast cancer - especially when she was fairly young (under 50)

Some other facts that may increase a woman's risk include:

- not having children
- having your first child when you're over 35
- drinking large amounts of alcohol
- periods that start very young or stop later than usual.

Having several of these risk factors does not mean that you will get breast cancer. Most women with breast cancer have no known risk factors.

How common is breast cancer?

One in 12 women will develop breast cancer by the age of 75. Most breast cancers occur in women over 50 years but it does develop in younger women.

In Tasmania about 300 women are diagnosed each year.

Men can develop breast cancer but it is rare: about one in every 100

Call The Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20