

Making an Informed Decision About **Breast Cancer Screening:**

For Women 50 and Older



What is this Booklet About?

Screening for breast cancer is a choice. Every woman must decide if screening is right for her. This booklet will help you with that decision by giving you the facts about breast cancer screening. This booklet may be useful if you:

- are 50 years old or older
- don't have breast cancer
- don't have any breast problems
- aren't at high risk for developing cancer, as discussed with your healthcare provider
- don't have a family history of breast cancer

You'll find information about the benefits and risks of breast cancer screening. We suggest that you also talk about screening with your healthcare provider. Your choice should be made by carefully thinking about the benefits and risks of breast cancer screening. There are some questions that can help you think about how these benefits and risks fit with your own personal values later in the booklet.

How Common Is Breast Cancer?

Breast cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in women. One out of every 7 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime.



As you get older the risk of getting breast cancer tends to go up.

Age Group	Number of Women who will Develop Breast Cancer over the their Lifetime ¹
40 to 49	1 out of 100
50 to 59	2 out of 100
60 to 69	4 out of 100
70 to 79	4 out of 100
80 to 89	4 out of 100

Over the past 20 years the rate of women who are diagnosed each year with breast cancer has stayed about the same. The biggest change is that the death rates are steadily getting lower.

1. <https://tableau.albertahealthservices.ca/#/views/The2021ReportonCancerStatisticsinAlberta/MCC-IncidenceMortality?iid=1>

Benefits and Risks

Having a mammogram for breast cancer screening has benefits and risks.

Benefits	Risks
Lives Saved: Having a regular mammogram is the best way to find breast cancer early when treatment is most likely to be successful.	False Positive: Sometimes screening can lead to further testing even though no cancer is actually present.
Mammograms are Safe and Effective: Mammograms can usually find lumps 2 or 3 years before you or your healthcare provider can feel them.	Over Detection: You may end up getting treatment for a cancer that never would have become life-threatening even if it was untreated.
Easier Treatment: Finding breast cancer early can often mean that less invasive (easier to handle) treatment is needed.	Missed Breast Cancer: Mammogram x-rays aren't perfect. You may develop breast cancer that doesn't get seen by screening.
Peace of Mind: You may feel better knowing that you're taking steps to find breast cancer early.	Anxiety: You may find breast cancer screening stressful because it may find cancer you were not aware of. You may also find the screening itself uncomfortable.
	Low Doses of Radiation: Mammograms use low doses of radiation. The benefits of regular screening makes up for the risks of getting these small amounts of radiation.

You may experience these benefits or risks in a different way than others might. You'll have to decide for yourself if you think the benefits are worth more than the risks. Talk this over with your healthcare provider to help you decide if screening is right for you.

5 Years of Screening

How Likely Is It To Find Breast Cancer during Screening?

If 100 women get screened regularly for 5 years:

- 85 will have a normal result in every screen (no sign of cancer)
- 15 will have at least 1 screen with an abnormal result and need more tests to find out if they have cancer

Of the 15 women with an abnormal result, about 1 out of 15 will have cancer. Of the 85 women with a normal result, about 1 out of 85 will have cancer.

How Likely Is It That a Woman's Life Will Be Saved by Screening?

When a breast cancer is found by screening, 16 out of 17 women's lives will be saved with treatment. In other words, about 94% of these women won't die of breast cancer. About 6% (1 out of 17) of women will die of breast cancer when their cancer was found by screening.

When a breast cancer is missed by screening, 15 out of 17 women's lives will still be saved with treatment once the cancer is found. In other words, about 88% of these women won't die of breast cancer. About 12% (2 out of 17) of women will die of breast cancer when their cancer was missed by screening.

5 Years Without Screening

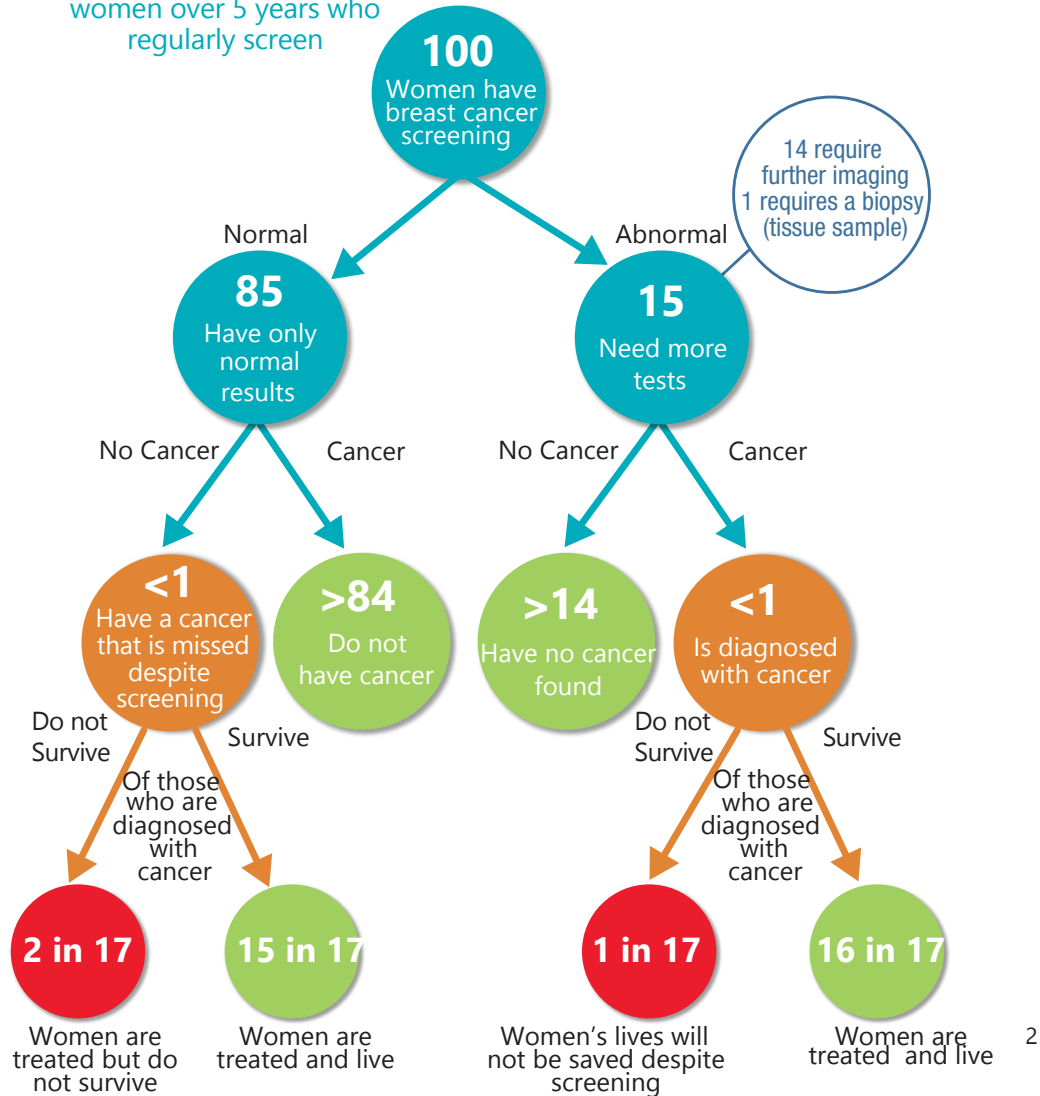
How Likely Is It That a Woman Will Be Diagnosed with Breast Cancer If She Doesn't Get Screened?

Without screening, 14 out of 17 women who are diagnosed and treated will survive breast cancer. In other words, about 82% of these women won't die of breast cancer.

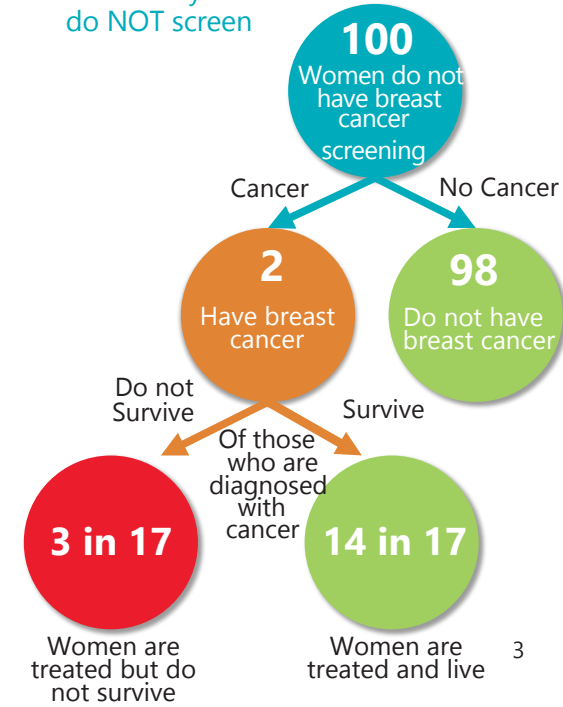
Without screening, about 18% (3 out of 17) of women diagnosed will die of breast cancer.

To give you an idea of some of the odds of different outcomes, the following charts show what happens when 100 women screen...

What happens to 100 women over 5 years who regularly screen



What happens to 100 women over 5 years who do NOT screen



2. Women in Alberta aged 50-69 who screened at least twice from 2007 to 2011, based on 5 year survival
 3. Women in Alberta aged 50-69 who did not screen from 2007 to 2011, based on 5 year survival

Another way of thinking about this is to look at what happens when 333 women screen over 5 years²:



2. Women in Alberta aged 50-69 who screened at least twice from 2007 to 2011, based on 5 year survival

What's Most Important to Me

Deciding to screen or not comes down to your own personal values. The following questions will help you think through what's most important to you when you make this decision. You may want to share your answers with your healthcare provider when you talk about screening.

Please choose how much you agree or disagree with each statement:

My Health	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My overall health is good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think my risk of breast cancer is low	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have regular checkups with my doctor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have regular screening mammograms (at least every 2 years for women aged 50 to 74)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I only have 1 drink or less of alcohol per day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a healthy body weight	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I exercise regularly This means at least 2½ hours (150 minutes) of moderate to vigorous physical activity, each week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have a family history of breast cancer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you agreed with most of the above statements it shows that you take steps to improve your health. Living a healthy lifestyle can help reduce your chances of developing breast cancer.

My Values	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I'm willing to do anything to find breast cancer as early as possible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm not very worried about the chance of a false positive result (more testing, maybe even a biopsy, when no cancer was actually present)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm willing to accept that I may be treated for something that might never have become a problem if left untreated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm very worried about my chances of getting breast cancer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you agree with most of the above statements it shows that you might think screening mammograms are worth the risk. Talk about this with your healthcare provider.

Tools for Assessing Your Personal Risk

Here are some links to online resources or tools that can help you assess your risk of developing breast cancer. Each tool uses different ways to figure out your risks so your results might change from one tool to another.

Title	What it's good for	Link	Source
Risk Assessment Tool	Can help you list the factors that raise or lower your risk of breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers	www.screeningforlife.ca then click Risk Calculator	Screeningforlife (AHS resource)
Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool	Can help you find your risk of developing breast cancer in the next 5 years or in your lifetime	www.cancer.gov/bcrisk-tool	National Cancer Institute (Gail Model)
Assess your risk	Can tell you what risk level you're at for breast or ovarian cancer over your lifetime average, increased, or high risk	www.assessyourrisk.org	Brightpink

*These resources are a guide only.

Remember, having a high risk of developing cancer doesn't mean you will get cancer. Having a low risk also doesn't mean you can't get cancer.

How Often Should I Get Screened?

We know that making a decision on if you should screen or not can be hard. There's a lot of information available. Now that you've had a chance to look at the information in this booklet, let's talk about how often we suggest you get breast cancer screening. This schedule has been developed for women who are not at an increased risk of breast cancer. The benefits and risks of screening have been carefully balanced but you still need to think about your personal values or any other risk factors you may have.

Age	Recommendation
Under the age of 40	The risk of breast cancer at this age is low. Screening mammograms are not usually needed before the age of 40. However, if you are worried about having a higher than average risk of breast cancer, talk to your healthcare provider.
40 to 49	The risk of developing breast cancer does go up with age but it's not clear that the benefit of a mammogram is higher than the risk for women in this age group. Talk to your healthcare provider about your breast cancer risk and if you need mammograms.
50 to 74	Breast cancer screening has proven to have the most benefit during these years. It's recommended that you have a mammogram every 2 years or as often as you and your healthcare provider decide is right for you.
75 or over	You may still benefit from a regular screening mammogram. Talk to your healthcare provider about this.

What to Do Once You Have Made a Decision

I'd like to Screen and Am between 50 and 74 Years of Age

If you have decided that you'd like breast cancer screening and you're in this age group, you can usually book a screening mammogram without a referral. Some clinics may ask you to have a healthcare provider before you book a screening mammogram so they know who to send the results to.

You may make an appointment by doing one of the following.

- If you already know of a radiology (x-ray) clinic you'd like to visit, call them directly to make an appointment.
- If you need help to find a clinic:
 1. visit our website at screeningforlife.ca
 2. click on "Where to Get Screened"
 3. select "Breast", or "Mobile breast" if you live in a rural community, and enter your Postal Code or Community
 4. call the clinic you chose to book an appointment
- If you don't have access to the website, you can get this information by calling us at 1-866-727-3926

I'd like to Screen and Am 75 or Older

If you have decided that you'd like to have breast cancer screening in this age group you'll need a referral from your healthcare provider.

Once you have a referral you can book an appointment by doing one of the following:

- If you know the radiology (x-ray) clinic you'd like to visit, you may call them directly to make an appointment.
- If you need help to find a clinic:
 1. visit our website at screeningforlife.ca
 2. click on "Where to Get Screened"
 3. select "Breast", or "Mobile breast" if you live in a rural community, and enter your Postal Code or Community
 4. call the clinic you chose to book an appointment
- If you don't have access to the website, you may get this information by calling us at 1-866-727-3926.

Contact Us

You're welcome to contact us if you have any questions or would like general information about any of the cancer screening programs.

Phone: 1-866-727-3926

Address: 2210-2nd Street SW, Calgary Alberta, T2S 3C3

Office Hours: Monday to Friday 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM

Out of Province inquiries: 403-355-3260 (long distance charges will apply)

Website: www.screeningforlife.ca