**WHAT IS A SCREENING MAMMOGRAM?**

A screening mammogram is an X-ray test to check your breasts for early signs of cancer, long before you notice any symptoms.

The sooner it is detected, the better the chances of successful treatment and full recovery.

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**DO NOT HESITATE TO ASK YOUR GP FOR ADVICE:**

- when you notice anything unusual about your breast: a lump, skin discolouration, a dimple, an inverted nipple, a rash around the nipple, an inflamed nipple or fluid or blood discharge from the nipple;
- if you run a high risk of developing breast cancer: several close relatives (grandmothers, mother, sisters or daughters) have had breast cancer.

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**WHAT IS THE BREAST CANCER SCREENING PROGRAMME?**

The Breast Cancer Screening Programme offers healthy women aged 50 to 69 the opportunity to have a screening mammogram. A screening mammogram is performed every two years at a mammography unit, a radiology centre that has officially been recognised by the Flemish government.

This programme aims to detect breast cancer at an early stage, so treatment can start immediately and more women can survive breast cancer.

This programme ensures the quality of the screening and an accurate monitoring of all results.

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**DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?**

For more information you can:
- contact your GP or gynaecologist;
- visit www.bevolkingsonderzoek.be;
- call the freephone number 0800 60 160.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to join this programme. Make sure you are well informed. Visit www.bevolkingsonderzoek.be/borstkanker.
THE SCREENING MAMMOGRAM

How do you have a screening mammogram taken?

Go to your appointment at the mammography unit on the suggested date and time. Bring your invitation letter or your GP’s prescription. Avoid using deodorant, body lotion or talcum powder on the day of your appointment, since it may affect the quality of the X-rays.

A mammography unit staff member will briefly explain to you what will happen. If you feel uncomfortable or worried, just say so.

The staff will check your GP’s or gynaecologist’s details and ask you to sign a breast cancer screening approval form.

A staff member will take two X-rays of each breast. That is what we call a screening mammogram. Each breast is flattened between two support plates for a couple of seconds. This may feel uncomfortable or even painful, but it ensures the photos are sufficiently sharp using minimal radiation, so the risk of the screening itself causing cancer is marginal.

The whole appointment, including dressing and undressing, does not take more than half an hour.

Free of charge
Screening is free for women aged 50 to 69 who have Belgian health insurance.

Waiting for the results
Your screening mammograms will be examined independently by two radiologists: the mammography unit’s radiologist and a radiologist at the Centrum voor Kankeropsporing (Centre for Cancer Detection). In case their assessments differ, a third radiologist will examine the X-rays. This process may be a bit time-consuming, but it improves the chances of a correct assessment.

About three weeks after the screening mammogram, you and your GP will receive the test result by letter. In most cases the mammogram will show no sign of cancer and additional tests will not be needed. Two years later you will receive a new invitation.

Consult your GP if you notice any changes in your breasts in the meantime.

Additional testing
If in your letter is mentioned that an abnormality in the breast is detected, then additional tests are needed.

This may seem alarming at first, but it does not mean you have breast cancer. Make an appointment with your GP to discuss the additional tests and assess the risks and costs.

The results
No test is one hundred percent accurate. Additional testing may show there is nothing wrong and you were worried for no reason. It is also possible the mammograms show no anomalies, even though you have breast cancer or develop breast cancer before the next screening mammogram. In that case you were unjustly reassured.

Some breast cancers develop so slowly that even without treatment women experience no discomfort their entire lives. Unfortunately it is impossible to predict exactly how the disease will progress. That is why treatment is always advised.

WHAT IS BREAST CANCER?

Breast cancer is a malignant tumour in the breast. It is the most common type of cancer in women. Mainly women above 50 are found to develop breast cancer.

Not all risk factors are known. Breast cancer may be hereditary. Often breast cancer is triggered by a combination of lifestyle and hormonal or environmental factors. You cannot prevent breast cancer. The sooner breast cancer is detected and treated, the better the chances of full recovery. That is why this programme is so valuable.

It is not advised to join this programme:
• if you have already been treated for breast cancer;
• if you have been diagnosed with breast cancer in the past ten years;
• if you have already had a mammogram in the past two years.