

# Breast Cancer

How to spot the symptoms  
and reduce your risk



Marie Keating  
FOUNDATION

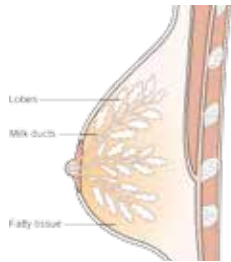
making cancer less frightening by enlightening

# breast cancer the facts

- **Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in Ireland. The number of cases is on the increase**
- **Every year 2,880 cases are diagnosed and 711 women die from the disease in Ireland. However, over 85% of women survive. There are over 28,000 survivors in Ireland today**
- **Breast cancer is most common in women from 50 years onwards but it can be diagnosed at a younger age**
- **1 in 10 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime**
- **If you are worried about your risk of breast cancer, contact your family doctor**

## What is breast cancer?

The breast is made up of millions of cells. Breast cancer develops when a single cell or group of cells begins to multiply out of control and forms a tumour.



The breasts consist of fatty tissue and lobules that are connected to the nipple by ducts. Breast cancer usually starts in cells that line a duct or lobule. Sometimes cells can break away and travel to other parts of the body, starting new tumours.

## Risks of getting breast cancer

This section is about things that affect the risk of breast cancer. Even if you have one or more of the risk factors overleaf, it doesn't mean you will definitely develop breast cancer.

Breast cancer is not fully understood but we do know some of the risk factors that increase a woman's chance of getting breast cancer. Knowing about these risks can help you to take important steps to look after yourself.

## Key Risk Factors

1. Being a woman
2. Starting your periods at a younger age or having a late menopause increases the risk of breast cancer.
3. A family history – women who have relatives with breast cancer have a higher risk of developing the disease themselves. Risk increases with the number of close relatives diagnosed. But even so, almost nine out of 10 breast cancers occur in women with no close relatives diagnosed with the disease.
4. Getting older – the risk of developing breast cancer goes up with age. The older you are, the greater your chances of developing the disease. Around four out of five breast cancers occur in women aged 50 and over.
5. Hormones and reproduction – the female sex hormone, oestrogen, can affect the development of breast cancer. Many of the things that affect the risk of breast cancer can be explained through their effect on hormone levels. Taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or oral contraceptives (also known as the pill) increases the risk of breast cancer. But HRT is an effective treatment for menopausal symptoms, and the pill also reduces the risk of ovarian and womb cancers. If you are considering starting or stopping HRT or the Pill, or if you have any concerns, see your doctor.
6. Having no children – or having your first child after age 30 can slightly increase your risk.

## Be breast aware

One of the most important things that you can do for your health is to get to know your breasts. Breast cancer is one of the most common female cancers so it is important to look after your breasts by being breast aware. Being breast aware means getting to know how your breasts look and feel so you know what is normal for you. You can then feel more confident about noticing any unusual changes.

Women themselves find most lumps. Remember that most breast lumps are not due to cancer but you can't be sure unless you go to the GP.

Even though it is uncommon, men can also get breast cancer so they need to be breast aware too.

**Early detection provides the best possible chance of surviving the disease.**

## How can I be breast aware?

Breast awareness means becoming familiar with your breasts and how they look and feel at different times of the month. Try to get used to looking at and feeling your breasts regularly. By doing this you will be able to notice any changes that aren't usual for you.

Use times like having a bath or shower to notice how your breasts look and feel. Running a soapy hand over your breasts and armpit helps you to feel the texture of your breast more easily. You may notice that your breasts change in size, shape or in how they feel at different times of the month.

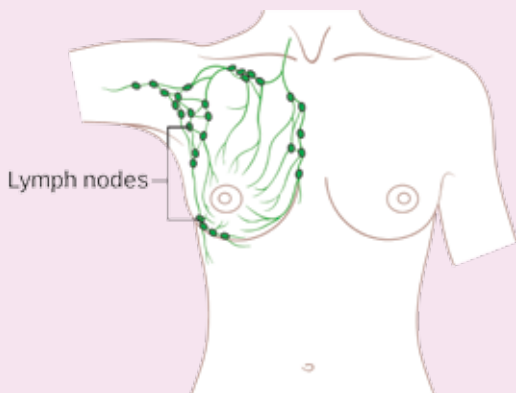
Your breasts may become lumpier or more tender around the time of your menstrual period, for example. As you become familiar with your breasts you'll become more confident in knowing what is normal for you.

**To watch a video on how to check your breasts, visit [www.mariekeating.ie/check-your-breasts](http://www.mariekeating.ie/check-your-breasts)**

## What to look out for?

- Any lumps, thickening or bumpy areas in the breast or armpit that seem different from other breast tissue. This is very important if it is new
- Any changes in the size, shape or feel of the breast (it may be normal for you to have one breast larger than the other)
- Changes to the nipple, such as crusting, ulceration, bleeding or a change in the direction or shape of the nipple
- An unusual discharge from one or both of your nipples
- Veins that are standing out more than usual for you
- Any puckering, dimpling or redness of the skin of the breast
- Swelling in your armpit or around your collarbone
- Pain or discomfort that is new to you and felt only on one side

## How to be breast aware: look and then feel your breasts, armpits and collar bone



## How can I reduce the risk of getting breast cancer?

- Maintain a healthy weight- Eat a balanced, low fat diet. Being overweight after the menopause increases a woman's risk of breast cancer.
- Doing regular exercise – Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five times or more a week. The more active you are, the more you can reduce the risk.
- Not drinking too much alcohol – The more you cut down on alcohol, the more you can reduce the risk of breast cancer and many other cancers.
- Breast feed your baby.
- If you smoke – stop; if you don't – don't start. Some research suggests that smoking increases the risk of breast cancer. Freetext QUIT to 50100 to get help from the National Smokers' Quitline.
- Getting to know your breasts. If you notice a change, see your GP as soon as possible. Nine out of ten breast changes are not due to cancer but it is very important to make sure.

## What is breast screening and when can I have it?

Breast screening aims to find cancers at an early stage when they are too small for you to see or feel. When breast cancer is found at an early stage, there is an excellent chance of successful treatment.

Women in Ireland are invited for a mammogram (breast x-ray) every two years from ages 50 to 69. This is a free service offered by BreastCheck which is the National Breast Screening Programme.

Make sure that you are on the register by contacting BreastCheck on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 or checking online at [www.breastcheck.ie](http://www.breastcheck.ie)

A man and a woman are walking together in a park, holding hands and smiling. The woman is wearing a red jacket, a colorful striped sweater, and a long, colorful patterned scarf. The man is wearing a dark jacket over a blue sweater. They are surrounded by trees with yellow and orange autumn leaves.

early detection  
**saves lives**

### **The Breast Awareness 5-point Code**

- Know what is normal for you
- Know what changes to look and feel for
- Look and feel for changes
- Report any changes to your doctor without delay
- Attend routine breast screening if you are aged between 50 and 69

## About the Marie Keating Foundation

Following their mother Marie's death in 1998, the Keating family promised that they would do everything they could to bring an end to cancer. The Marie Keating Foundation helps men and women prevent cancer, detect it at its earliest stages and journey through cancer diagnosis, treatment and survivorship.

Through its community information service, the Foundation's nurses have advised over 230,000 people on the causes and risk factors of cancer. The Foundation offers national awareness and education programmes covering the most common cancers affecting people in Ireland, including bowel, breast, lung, prostate and skin cancer.

Through its Comfort Fund, the Marie Keating Foundation provides financial assistance to people who are receiving treatment for any kind of cancer and who find themselves in financial difficulty as a result. In 2016 alone, over 525 families received assistance from the Comfort Fund.

The Marie Keating Foundation supports cancer survivors through its Survive & Thrive programmes which are run nationwide, free of charge, for men and women who have finished their cancer treatment. Over 600 cancer survivors have attended courses and seminars since 2015.

*On 2 February 1998, our mother Marie died from cancer. We started this Foundation with the aim of making cancer less frightening by enlightening. We also hope that other families will not have to go through what we did and to ensure that such a wonderful person did not die in vain.*

**Take care,**

*The Keating Family*



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