



Screening for breast cancer

How common is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is not very common until about 40 years of age, but it becomes more common as women get older.

The incidence of breast cancer has increased over the last 20 years. Now, more than 6000 new cases are diagnosed each year in Australia.

One in 15 women will develop breast cancer during their lifetime.

Why is screening for breast cancer important?

Early detection of breast cancer is very important; it increases the success of treatment and reduces the risk of death.

Research has shown that a mammogram is the most effective way of finding early breast cancer in older women.

Some symptoms, such as a lump in the breast, may be a sign of breast cancer. However, there may be other causes. If you do have any breast symptoms, consult your doctor immediately.

There is no proven way of preventing breast cancer. Research is underway on dietary factors and drugs that may reduce the chance of developing breast cancer in those at high risk.



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Mammograms

A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast. Regular screening is important for those at risk, because sometimes breast cancer can be present with no obvious signs or symptoms. A mammogram can detect breast cancer before it can be felt as a lump.

When having a mammogram, the breasts are flattened to obtain a good x-ray picture. This may be a bit uncomfortable and for a few women it may be painful. However,

it is a quick procedure and is the best way of finding cancers as small as a grain of rice.

Who should have a mammogram?

Women in the 50 to 69 year age group should have one at least every two years. They can visit the Breast Screening Programme in Lismore or the mobile van in smaller centres. Those who have never been screened should make an appointment as soon as possible.

Routine mammograms are not yet recommended for women in the 40 to 50 year age group. However, women in this age group can have one if they request it.

Breast cancer is a major health problem in our community. The most effective way to reduce the number of breast cancer deaths is for women between 50 and 69 years to have a mammogram every two years.

Remember, you may have breast cancer without any obvious signs or symptoms. A mammogram greatly increases the chance of such a cancer being detected.

To make an appointment for this free service, phone 13 20 50.

If you do have breast symptoms, see your GP immediately. Early detection means more effective treatment and more lives saved.

