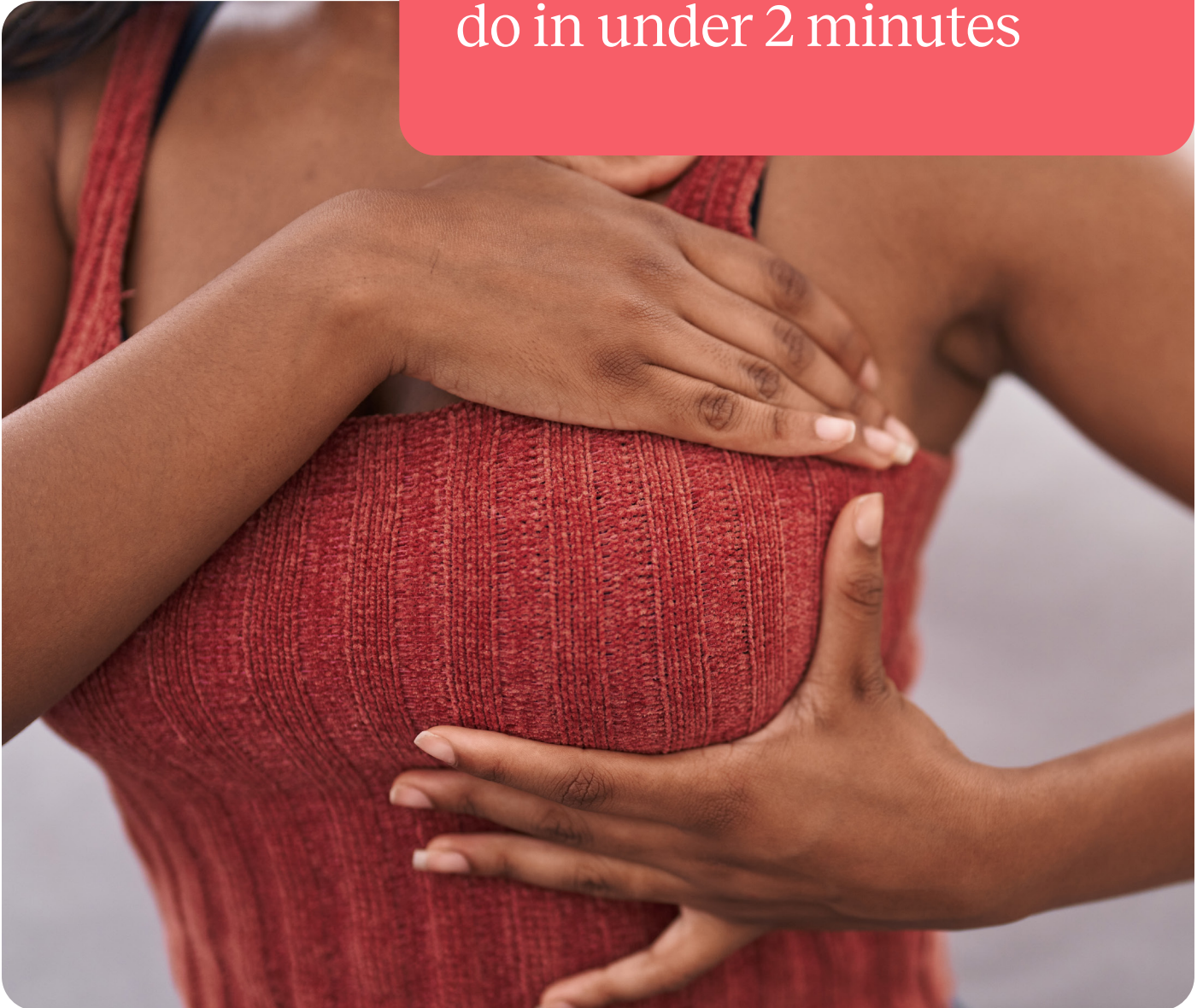


The breast check you can do in under 2 minutes



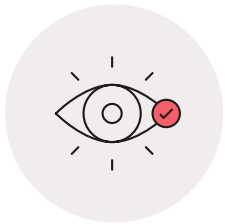
Checking your breasts regularly is one of the simplest health habits you can adopt. It only takes a couple of minutes and helps you get familiar with what feels and looks normal for you. The sooner you recognise a change, the sooner you can act and early detection makes treatment more effective.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women worldwide. **Millions of people are diagnosed each year**, and while the risk rises with age, younger people can also develop it. Men are not exempt either, though it is far less common in men.

Most breast changes are not cancer. They may be caused by cysts, fibroadenomas, or hormonal changes. But it is always safer to get anything unusual checked.

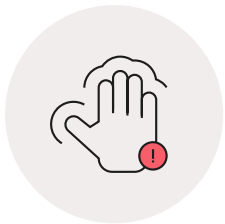
How to check your breasts in under 2 minutes

Many people avoid breast checks because they think they're complicated, but the process is simple. You don't need medical training or a set technique — **the key is getting to know your own body**. Once you know what feels normal, you'll be able to spot when something changes. A self-check takes no more than two minutes and can be built into your monthly routine.



Step 1: Look

- Stand in front of a mirror with your arms relaxed at your sides.
- Then raise your arms above your head and finally press your hands firmly onto your hips.
- Check for changes in shape, outline, or size of the breasts.
- Look for any dimpling, puckering, swelling, or redness of the skin.



Step 2: Feel (standing or sitting)

- Use the flat pads of your fingers, not your fingertips.
- Move in small circular motions, covering the entire breast from collarbone to ribcage, and into the armpit.
- Apply light, medium, and firm pressure to feel both surface tissue and deeper areas.



Step 3: Feel (lying down)

- Place a pillow under one shoulder to spread the tissue evenly.
- Use the opposite hand to check each breast.
- Work systematically so no area is missed.

Try to do this once a month, around the same time. For those who menstruate, a few days after your period is often easiest as breasts are less swollen or tender.

What to look out for

Knowing what to look for during a self-check is just as important as doing it regularly.

Breast cancer doesn't always start with a lump, so being alert to a variety of changes gives you the best chance of spotting something early. Many changes will turn out to be harmless, but it's safer to be cautious.



Book a GP appointment if you notice:

- **A lump or thickened area** that feels different from the rest of the breast
- **Changes in size, shape, or symmetry** between breasts
- **Skin changes** such as dimpling, puckering, redness, or thickening
- **Nipple changes** such as inversion, rash, scaling, or discharge (that isn't breast milk)
- **Swelling or a lump under the arm** or around the collarbone
- **Persistent pain** in one area of the breast or armpit

How breast tissue changes through life

It's normal for breast tissue to feel and look different at various stages of life. These changes are usually linked to hormones and don't necessarily mean something is wrong. Understanding how your breasts evolve over time makes it easier to spot when something doesn't fit the pattern.

- **Menstrual cycle** – Hormonal changes can make breasts feel fuller, lumpier, or more tender before a period. These changes usually settle afterwards.
 - **Pregnancy and breastfeeding** – Breasts enlarge, nipples darken, and veins may be more visible. Lumps are often blocked ducts or mastitis but should still be checked.
 - **Perimenopause and menopause** – Breasts may lose firmness and density as hormone levels drop. Fatty tissue replaces glandular tissue, which can make them feel different.
 - **Later life** – After menopause, new lumps or changes should always be checked promptly, as hormonal fluctuations are less likely to be the cause.
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Common myths about breast checks

There are many misconceptions about breast checks that can create confusion or false reassurance. Clearing up these myths can encourage more people to check their breasts with confidence and to seek help when something feels different.

- **Myth: Only older women get breast cancer.**
Risk does increase with age, but younger women, and men, can also be affected.
- **Myth: A lump always means cancer.**
Most lumps are benign. But the only way to know for sure is with medical assessment.
- **Myth: Family history is the main cause.**
While inherited genetic changes raise risk, most people diagnosed have no close family history.
- **Myth: Breast pain is always a sign of cancer.**
Pain is more often linked to hormones or benign conditions. Persistent pain, however, should still be checked.

Risk factors for breast cancer

Understanding the factors that increase risk doesn't mean cancer is inevitable. Instead, it helps you be more aware and act where possible. **Some risks can't be controlled**, such as age or genetics, while others can be reduced through lifestyle choices.

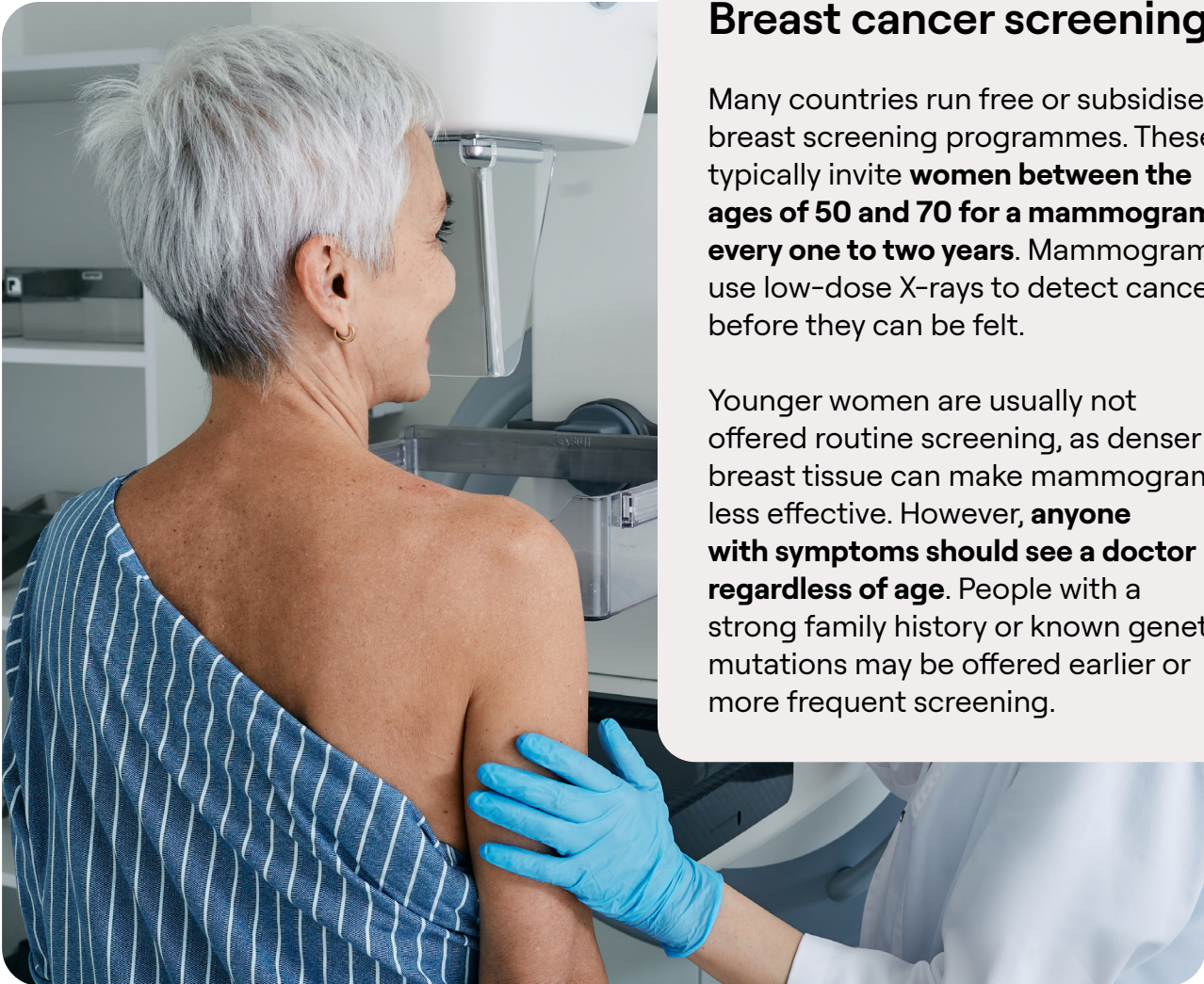
Unchangeable risk factors:

- Increasing age
- Family history of breast or ovarian cancer
- Inherited gene changes such as BRCA1 and BRCA2
- Early start to periods or late menopause

Lifestyle-related risk factors:

- Alcohol consumption
- Lack of regular exercise
- Being overweight or obese, especially after menopause
- Smoking

Being aware of risk factors doesn't guarantee prevention, but it can encourage healthier habits and closer attention to breast changes.



Breast cancer screening

Many countries run free or subsidised breast screening programmes. These typically invite **women between the ages of 50 and 70 for a mammogram every one to two years**. Mammograms use low-dose X-rays to detect cancers before they can be felt.

Younger women are usually not offered routine screening, as denser breast tissue can make mammograms less effective. However, **anyone with symptoms should see a doctor regardless of age**. People with a strong family history or known genetic mutations may be offered earlier or more frequent screening.

Male breast cancer

Breast cancer is often thought of as a female disease, **but men can develop it too**. Although rare, awareness is important, as delays in seeking help can affect outcomes. Men have a small amount of breast tissue behind the nipple, and changes in this tissue can be a warning sign.

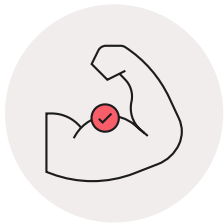
Signs to look out for include:

- A lump behind or around the nipple
- Nipple discharge, sometimes blood-stained
- Skin dimpling or redness
- Nipple retraction (pulling inwards)

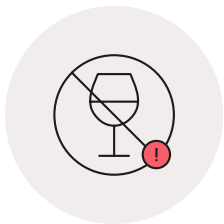
Because men may not expect breast cancer to affect them, they may wait longer to see a doctor. **Raising awareness can help ensure that any changes are checked quickly.**

How lifestyle can support breast health

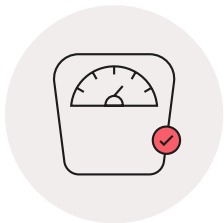
While breast cancer cannot always be prevented, lifestyle choices can influence your risk and improve overall health. These habits also support your heart, bones, and immune system, making them worthwhile beyond breast health. **By focusing on daily changes, you can lower certain risks while giving your body the best chance of early recovery if illness does occur.**



Stay active – Regular exercise helps regulate hormones, including oestrogen and insulin, which play a role in breast cancer risk. Physical activity also supports a healthy weight and reduces inflammation. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity movement each week, such as brisk walking, cycling, or swimming. Even short, daily bursts of movement are protective.



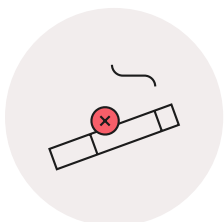
Limit alcohol – Alcohol is a class one carcinogen and there is no safe level of drinking. It increases the risk of breast cancer, and the more you drink, the higher the risk. While alcohol's effect on oestrogen is one factor, it also causes DNA damage and other changes that raise cancer risk. Reducing alcohol, or avoiding it altogether, is one of the most effective steps you can take to lower your risk.



Maintain a healthy weight – Excess body fat, particularly after menopause, increases levels of oestrogen and other growth hormones that can drive breast cancer. Keeping your weight within a healthy range helps lower this risk. Balanced eating and regular exercise are the safest and most sustainable ways to manage weight.



Eat a balanced diet – A diet high in fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, and lean proteins supports overall health and may lower cancer risk. Plant-based foods are rich in antioxidants and fibre, which help regulate digestion and reduce inflammation. Reducing processed foods, red meat, and sugary snacks may also contribute to lower long-term risk.



Quit smoking – Smoking has been linked to a higher risk of several cancers, including breast cancer. Chemicals in tobacco damage DNA and reduce the body's ability to repair itself. Stopping smoking improves circulation and lung function, reduces cancer risk over time, and benefits almost every organ.



Support after diagnosis

A breast cancer diagnosis can bring shock, uncertainty, and fear. Medical treatment is only part of the picture. **Emotional, social, and practical support are just as important for recovery.** Knowing where to turn can make the process feel less overwhelming and help people feel more in control.

- **Breast care nurses** – Specialist nurses provide consistent guidance throughout diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. They explain medical procedures, answer questions, and act as a point of contact for concerns. Having a named nurse can reduce anxiety and ensure people feel supported.
- **Support groups** – Both in-person and online groups connect people going through similar experiences. Talking to others who understand can provide reassurance, reduce feelings of isolation, and offer practical advice about treatment side effects or daily challenges.
- **Counselling** – Mental health support is crucial during and after treatment. Counsellors and psychologists help with anxiety, low mood, or fear of recurrence. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and other talking therapies can give coping strategies that improve quality of life.
- **Global organisations** – Reputable cancer charities and health organisations provide free, evidence-based resources. These include information on treatment options, nutrition during cancer care, and how to prepare for life after treatment. Examples include Breast Cancer Now, Cancer Research UK, the American Cancer Society, and the World Health Organization.

Practical and emotional support can make a real difference in coping with treatment and recovery.

When to speak to a doctor

Many people put off seeing a doctor because they're worried about wasting time or being told it's nothing. **But when it comes to breast health, it's always better to be safe.** Doctors are used to seeing people with breast changes, and **most cases turn out to be harmless.** Still, the reassurance of a professional check is invaluable.

See a doctor if you:

- Find a new lump or thickened area
- Notice one breast looking or feeling different to the other
- Have blood-stained nipple discharge
- Experience pain that continues after your period or persists for weeks

Don't wait until your next screening invitation. **If something feels unusual, make an appointment as soon as possible.**



How HealthHero can help

With **HealthHero**, you can book an online GP consultation quickly and discreetly. A doctor can assess your symptoms, arrange further tests, and guide you through the next steps. You don't have to wait or worry alone.