



Breast Cancer
Foundation NZ

Breast Awareness

What you need to know



Be breast aware

Maybe you want to find out more about your own breast health, or perhaps your life has been touched by breast cancer. Knowing the signs and symptoms of breast cancer and understanding your risk factors could save your life. In this guide, you'll find the basic information you need to be breast aware and what you can do to reduce your risk of breast cancer.

The good news is that most breast lumps are not cancerous. What's more, the 10-year survival rate is 92% if breast cancer is found through screening mammography.

Breast Cancer Foundation NZ (BCFNZ) is the only breast cancer charity organisation to have a team of specialist medical advisors. They, together with our professional educators, develop all of our materials, including this booklet.

If you're worried about any changes to your breasts, don't just rely on this information. Go and see your family doctor straight away and discuss your concerns.

We offer free breast health presentations and provide free resources like this booklet. Get in touch if you'd like us to talk to your organisation, workplace or community group.

We hope you find this guide helpful, because being breast aware could save your life, or the life of someone you know.

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New Zealand breast cancer facts

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women and you probably know someone affected by it.

One in nine...

Over 3,300 New Zealand women and about 25 men are diagnosed every year. One in nine women will get breast cancer in her lifetime.

70% over 50

The risk of breast cancer increases as women age. Over 70% of all cases occur in women over 50.

65% higher mortality for Māori

Māori and Pacific women are at greater risk of dying of breast cancer than other New Zealand women. Māori have a 65% higher mortality rate from breast cancer than non-Māori.

600 die each year

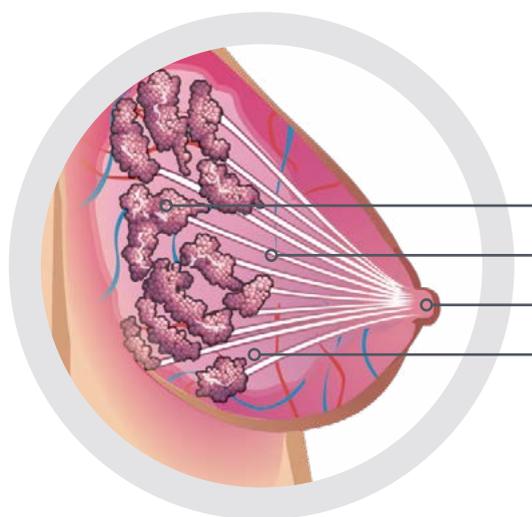
More than 600 New Zealanders die from breast cancer each year.

9 women diagnosed a day

Today, around nine women will find out they have breast cancer.

What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer occurs when faulty breast cells divide and grow without control, sometimes invading the surrounding tissue. In some cases, the cancer may grow very slowly, while in others it develops more rapidly.



To understand what breast cancer is, it helps to know what a breast looks like...

Lobules (milk sacs)

Milk ducts

Nipple

Fatty tissue

The breast is mostly made up of breast tissue and fat. Breast tissue consists of a network of lobules, which produce milk, and ducts that carry milk to the nipple during breastfeeding.

The breast also contains nerves, blood vessels, lymph vessels and connective tissue that helps hold everything in place.

Breast cancer can occur in different parts of the breast. Most starts in the ducts (which carry milk to the nipple during breastfeeding), but some also starts in the lobules (which produce milk).



Important fact. Breast cancer is largely treatable and survivable if detected early enough. 80% of New Zealand women diagnosed with breast cancer live 10 years or longer.

How to be breast aware

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in New Zealand women. Your risk increases as you get older, so every woman needs to be breast aware from the age of 20.

This means:

- Knowing what is normal for your breasts.
- Checking your breasts regularly for changes.
- Reporting changes immediately to your family doctor.
- Considering regular mammograms once you turn 40. Enrol with BreastScreen Aotearoa for free mammograms once you turn 45.

Being breast aware can help find breast cancer earlier.

Life Stage Action	20-39 yrs	40-49 yr	50-69 yrs	70+ yrs
Check your breasts	✓	✓	✓	✓
Show changes to your doctor quickly	✓	✓	✓	✓
Have mammograms*		✓	✓	✓

* **40-49 years** Consider having once a year

* **50-69 years** Every 2 years unless recommended by your doctor

* **70 years+** Discuss with your doctor and continue if in good health. If you're aged 70-74, check with BreastScreen Aotearoa to see if you're entitled to a free mammogram



Important fact. Breast cancer can occur at any time, even between mammograms. Around half of all breast cancers are diagnosed because women report a change to their doctor.

Checking your breasts regularly is important

It's as easy as

T

L

C



Touch

Touch both breasts

Press quite firmly using three fingers. You're feeling for any lumps or thickening in the breast, even up to the collarbone and into the armpits.



Look

Look in a mirror

Raise your arms above your head.
Does this change the appearance of your breasts or nipples?



Check

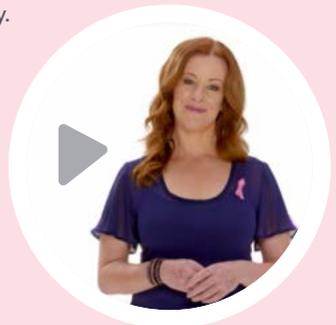
Check with your doctor

Check any breast changes with your doctor, even if you've had a mammogram recently.



Watch

Actor/director Jacqueline Nairn shows you how at anychanges.co.nz



Call us. If you or your family wish to speak to our breast nurse, freephone **0800 BC NURSE** (0800 226 8773)

Signs of breast cancer

In the early stages of breast cancer there is usually no pain and there may be no symptoms at all. As the cancer grows, however, symptoms may appear. These need to be checked by your doctor.

Be alert for new lumps, changes in breast shape or size and unusual pain that won't go away. If you notice any of the following breast changes, show your doctor urgently.



Inverted nipple

One of the more noticeable changes is a **newly retracted or turned-in nipple**



Nipple discharge

If you notice a discharge coming from your nipple, show your doctor. **It may be bloodstained or clear and occurs without squeezing.**



Crusty nipple

Some women experience crustiness on or around their nipple. Sometimes it's like a **red rash or flaky, scaly skin**. There may be some **itching or burning**.



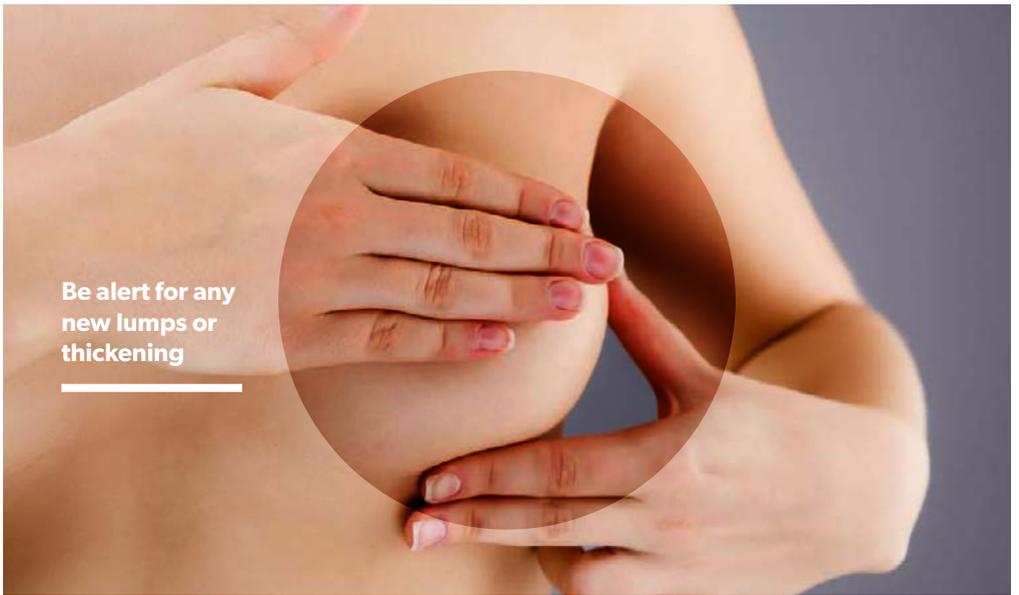
Dimples or puckering

Some women find **dimples, puckering or dents on their breasts**. These can appear anywhere, even on the underside of the breast.



Skin like orange peel

A change in breast colour, reddening or inflammation needs to be checked out. **The breast may be swollen and the skin may look like orange peel because the pores stand out in the inflamed area.**



Be alert for any
new lumps or
thickening

New lump or thickening

A lump or bump is not always a sign of cancer, but show your doctor to rule it out. Lumps can appear in the breast, armpit area or around the collarbone. Sometimes it could be a thickening in the breast tissue that feels different to the rest of your breast.

Other conditions

Other breast conditions may also need further testing to exclude cancer, including:

- **Calcifications** (flecks of calcium in the breast).
- **Cysts** (fluid-filled sacs) which are more common in women between 35 and 50.
- **Fibroadenomas** (benign or non-cancerous tumours made of glandular and fibrous tissue) which are common in younger women.
- **Hyperplasia** (an overgrowth of cells in the ducts or lobules).

What is normal?

It's normal for your breasts to be a different size or shape from each other and to differ from other women. Breasts also change throughout your life, often due to the effects of hormones. Hormones can also make your breasts feel different at certain times of the month - for example, just before a period they may feel lumpy and tender. As you get older, your breasts may become smaller and feel softer.



Important fact. Breast cancer lumps tend to be painless, hard to the touch, fixed in position and persistent even after a few periods. They usually grow slowly, particularly in women over 50. A lump has generally developed over many years before it gets to a stage where you can feel it.

What if my breasts change?

Most breast changes are not breast cancer, but any changes should be checked by your doctor as soon as possible.

- **Your doctor will examine your breasts**, ask questions about your concerns and find out about any relevant medical and family history. This will help your doctor understand what is normal for you, or what needs checking again at a later date. If your doctor is concerned, he or she may suggest further testing.
- **You may be referred for a mammogram and/or an ultrasound.** This can be done at a public hospital radiology department or breast clinic. Alternatively, you may choose to go to a private radiology centre or a private breast clinic.
- If something needs further checking/examination, **then you may need to have a biopsy.** This removes a small sample of cells or tissue from the affected area in your breast. This may be done under local anaesthetic using a fine needle, or with a larger needle if a tissue sample is needed. The breast cells or tissue are examined by a pathologist who will provide a diagnosis.
- **If cancer is found**, your family doctor or specialist will advise you of the results and discuss with you the choices of treatment and your next steps. You can be referred to a public hospital or you may choose to go to a private clinic for your treatment.

Throughout this process, **you may wish to have a support person or whānau member with you.** With your permission, the results may be forwarded to your doctor. If you have any questions about the investigation into your breast changes, talk to your doctor or seek a second opinion.

BCFNZ recommends that any significant changes should always undergo triple testing.

1. a clinical examination by a doctor;
2. imaging (mammography and/or ultrasound); and
3. a biopsy.



**a clinical
examination by
a doctor**



**imaging
mammography
and/or ultrasound**



a biopsy

About mammograms

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is a safe, low-dose x-ray of the breast that can pick up very small breast cancers, long before a lump can be felt. Women have a 92% chance of surviving breast cancer 10 years or longer if the cancer is detected by a mammogram. Because the risk of breast cancer increases as you get older, BCFNZ recommends women consider having regular screening mammograms from the age of 40.

What happens during a mammogram?

Your breast is briefly pressed between two plates of the x-ray machine. This is to spread the tissue apart and get a clearer image of the breast. Some women may find this uncomfortable, but it is only for a short time. Tell the radiographer (the person doing your mammogram) if it is too uncomfortable. Afterwards, the images of your breast are checked by a radiologist (specialist doctor).



Watch Stacey's mammogram at www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/mammograms

Mammograms can pick up very small breast cancers, long before a lump can be felt.

Organising a mammogram

Where do I have my mammogram?

BreastScreen Aotearoa (BSA) is New Zealand's free national breast screening programme, providing free mammograms every two years for eligible women. You're eligible if you are 45 or over and have no breast cancer symptoms (if you have symptoms, see your family doctor). Free screening continues until age 69, although the government has announced it intends to progressively increase the age to 74. If you're aged 70-74, check with BSA to see if you're entitled to a free mammogram. Mammograms can also be done at:

- Public hospitals (only for women who have symptoms or are at high risk)
- Private x-ray clinics
- Private breast clinics

You may wish to take a support person or whānau member with you.

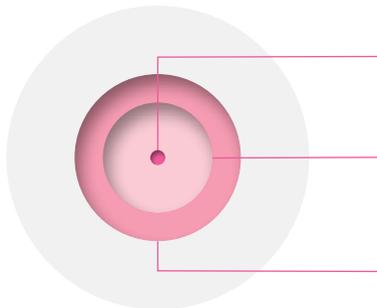
How much does a mammogram cost?

If you have no symptoms and you're not eligible for free screening, having a mammogram at a private radiology or breast clinic is your only option. The cost may vary (approximately \$160 - \$250). However, if your doctor is concerned about your symptoms, you can be referred to a public hospital at no cost or choose to pay for a mammogram privately.

Will I get a reminder about my next mammogram?

Once you have registered with BreastScreen Aotearoa, they will contact you before your next mammogram is due. Most private breast clinics and family doctors also have a recall system, but it pays to ask at reception to ensure you get a reminder each year.

Lump Size



2mm

Size of the smallest cancer found by regular mammogram

14.5mm

Average size of cancer found by regular mammogram

22mm

Average size of cancer found by chance

*Source: BreastScreen Aotearoa



BreastScreen Aotearoa. To enrol for a free screening mammogram from age 45, contact BreastScreen Aotearoa, freephone **0800 270 200** or register online **www.timetoscreen.nz**

**Know how your
breasts normally
look and feel
from age 20.**



Helena died of breast cancer at age 36

Advice for women under 40

Breast cancer is not common in younger women

Only 5% of breast cancer cases occur in women under the age of 40. While the risk of getting breast cancer is much lower for younger women, their breast cancer can be more aggressive.

Be breast aware from the age of 20

As mammograms are not suitable for screening young women, the best thing you can do to protect yourself is to be breast aware from the age of 20. This means knowing how your breasts normally look and feel and checking for any unusual changes (unusual breast changes are covered in this booklet).

Feeling your breasts while bathing or showering and then looking at your breasts in the mirror while drying should become a regular routine. Show your doctor if you can feel a hard lump or thickening in your breast or if you have any unusual signs or symptoms that persist.

Mammograms are not standard for younger women

Screening mammograms are not usually recommended for women under 40, as their breast tissue tends to be denser. This makes it difficult to see small changes on a mammogram image. An ultrasound scan (which uses high frequency sound waves) may be used to investigate a significant breast change but this is not used as a routine screening tool. During an ultrasound scan, a gel is put on your breast and an imaging device is moved over the skin. This is the same machine that is used to image a baby during pregnancy.

Understand your family history

Talk with your family members about cancer on both sides of your family. If your mother or sister has had breast or ovarian cancer before the age of 50, it's recommended you get screened annually starting 10 years prior to the affected family member's age at diagnosis. While the risk of hereditary breast cancer is low, talk about it with your doctor. If you are potentially at high risk, you may be eligible for genetic testing with Genetic Health Service NZ. This would require a referral from your doctor.



Important fact. Most women who get breast cancer have no close relatives with the disease. Only 5%-10% of breast cancers are deemed hereditary.

The risk factors

Risks you can't change

We don't know exactly what causes breast cancer, but we do know that certain risk factors can increase your chance of getting it.



Being a woman

This is the highest risk factor for developing breast cancer. Men can get breast cancer too, but they account for less than 1% of all cases.

Getting older

Age is the second most important risk factor. As a woman ages, it's more likely that abnormal changes may occur in her breasts. Over 70% of all breast cancer cases occur in women aged over 50.

Family history

Although most people with breast cancer have no family history, you may have a higher risk of developing breast cancer if your mother, sister or daughter has had breast and/or ovarian cancer (especially if she was younger than 50 when diagnosed). Hereditary breast cancer is rare. The most common cause is a mutation in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. These abnormalities can be inherited from your mother or father.

Women of Ashkenazi Jewish descent have a greater risk of breast cancer due to the higher prevalence of the BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutation in that population.

Dense breast tissue

Your breasts comprise a mix of fatty and glandular tissue. Some women have a higher percentage of dense glandular breast tissue, which can be a risk factor for breast cancer and make it harder for a mammogram to detect cancer. After your mammogram, ask your radiologist or doctor about your breast density and how best to screen or monitor your breast health if your density is high.

Although hereditary breast cancer is rare, women of Ashkenazi Jewish descent are at greater risk due to the higher prevalence of the BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutation.

Older women are at highest risk of developing breast cancer.



Watch Marilyn's story at www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/personal-stories

Previous breast issues

You have a higher risk of developing breast cancer if you've had breast cancer in the past.

Other conditions that increase risk include:

- DCIS (ductal carcinoma in-situ).
- Pre-cancerous breast conditions, e.g. lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS)/ lobular neoplasia.
- Some benign breast diseases, e.g. atypical ductal/lobular hyperplasia.
- Radiation treatment of the chest, e.g. for Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Unfortunately, we have no control over any of these risk factors. However, there are some risk factors with a direct link to breast cancer that you can influence, and these are outlined next.



Important. Discuss the incidence of breast cancer in your family and talk to your doctor if a family history exists.

The risk factors...

Risks you can change

The good news is that there are breast cancer risk factors you can influence through lifestyle changes. If any of the following factors apply to you, think about taking action.



Eat well

Your body weight

Being overweight or obese with a high body mass index (BMI) increases the risk of breast cancer for women after menopause.

Try and maintain a healthy weight throughout your life. Eat a diet that is rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Choose foods that have 'good' fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats) and ensure those with 'bad' fats (saturated and trans fats) are occasional treats only. Avoid processed foods, which are usually high in sugar.



Cut back

Your alcohol intake

The more alcohol a woman drinks, the greater the risk of breast cancer later in life.

At any age, studies show that for each standard drink consumed the risk of breast cancer increases. Therefore, it is suggested to limit your alcohol intake.



Get moving

Your activity level

A lifestyle with little physical activity can increase your risk of breast cancer. Regular exercise appears to reduce the risk of breast cancer in post-menopausal women.

The World Health Organisation recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or at least 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity throughout the week or an equivalent combination of both. Go for a walk with a friend, play a team sport, go bush with the kids. Just get out there and get active!

Hormone exposure

Hormone exposure

Being exposed to hormones for long, uninterrupted periods can affect your breast cancer risk.

Factors that increase this risk include:

- Using combined hormone replacement therapy (HRT) with oestrogen and progesterone for five years or longer. HRT can also increase breast density which may reduce the chance of detecting a cancer on a mammogram. Tell your mammographer if you are taking HRT.
- Taking certain oral contraceptive pills over the age of 40.
- Not having children, or having your first child after 30 years.
- Breastfeeding for a short time, or not at all.
- Early commencement of menstruation (<12yrs) and late age at menopause (>55yrs) increases breast cancer risk.



Reduce your risk of breast cancer by making healthy lifestyle choices.



Important fact. Deodorants/anti-perspirants, silicone implants and wearing underwire bras DO NOT cause breast cancer.

Rose's story

Call it a sixth sense, or as Rose Wharepapa puts it, "a feeling in her waters." But the moment the radiographer told her there was an abnormality in her right breast, she knew she had cancer.

A personal trainer at Les Mills, New Lynn, Auckland, Rose was living a healthy life. She never smoked; exercised five times a week and only enjoyed the odd tippie.

"It's crazy. The more women I speak to about my experience, the more they say the same thing," Rose says.

The mother of five had just turned 43, and therefore did not qualify for public funding for her mammogram. New Zealand's free breast screening programme is only for women aged 45 to 69, but like many women around the country, Rose had no idea that breast cancer represents nearly half of all cancers in women aged between 40-44.

Thankfully her "gut feeling" to get her breasts checked overcame the cost of paying for the straightforward procedure, which can range from \$160 - \$250.

"Yes, I had to pay \$180. It would've been better to pay nothing, but \$180 is a small price to save your life. Finding it as early as I did only increased my chances of survival," Rose says.

Rose's mother had died of cervical cancer at 48, making her more aware of the devastating effects of battling the disease, and her grandmother also had breast cancer. At her request, Rose's doctor made a referral for a mammogram, but perhaps out of dread, Rose stalled on making the booking.

But there'd be constant reminders, an ad on television, a magazine article; she'd spot the BreastScreen Aotearoa mobile screening unit, until finally one of her clients talked about her upcoming mammogram, prompting Rose to make her appointment in early 2006.

The scan showed a number of cysts in her right breast.

"I was told not to worry, that a lot of women have little cysts in their breasts and it could just be a little bit of hardening. They did an ultrasound, and recommended a biopsy.

"I said, 'I know I've got cancer'," Rose recalls.

Rose was told she had ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS), a pre-invasive cancer that starts in the breast duct cells.

Doctors explained that Rose had a 50 per cent chance of the cancer becoming invasive, so she underwent a bilateral mastectomy and reconstructive surgery.

"I thought, 'I'm not going through this again.' I never had chemotherapy as the cancer hadn't travelled into my lymph nodes," Rose says.

Today, Rose knows she was spared further treatment by her choice to have a mammogram and subsequent surgery.

"DCIS is not a fast-spreading cancer, but I feel like if I hadn't gone for a mammogram, would it have been too late? We should think of a mammogram like a smear test, or regular blood tests. You can live a very healthy life and not smoke or drink, exercise regularly and not be overweight, but you can still get cancer. Go and have a mammogram," urges Rose.



Rose

These women share their stories



To see the individual stories of New Zealand women diagnosed with breast cancer, visit www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/personal-stories



Need advice?

Call our breast nurse on **0800 BC NURSE** (0800 226 8773)

Visit www.anychanges.co.nz to find out more.

Breast health summary

The basics you need to know

To be breast aware, know your B.R.A.S. Here's a handy summary of the main breast health messages in this booklet.

B

Breast aware

Be breast aware from 20 and know what's normal for you. Check your breasts regularly.

R

Reduce your risk

Reduce your risk through healthy lifestyle choices. Know your family history and talk to your doctor about hereditary breast cancer concerns.

A

Act promptly

Act on unusual breast changes, show your doctor promptly.

S

Screening mammograms

Consider having screening mammograms annually from 40. Enrol with BreastScreen Aotearoa at 45 on 0800 270 200 or online at www.timetoscreen.nz



Remember...

- Most lumps and bumps are not cancerous, but show your doctor if you notice any breast changes.
- Your risk of breast cancer increases as you get older.
- Regular mammograms from 40 can help find breast cancer early when it's more treatable.

My breast health

Checklist



Tick

I know how my breasts normally look and feel.



I check them regularly and know the signs and symptoms of breast cancer.



I have asked about any history of breast and ovarian cancer in both sides of my family.



I will get any unusual breast changes checked by my doctor and consider starting mammograms at age 40.



I know the risk factors I can influence.



Notes



Free mammograms.

Are you aged between 45 and 69?

Book your free mammogram with BreastScreen Aotearoa, the national screening programme. **Aged 70-74?** Call to check, freephone **0800 270 200**

About Breast Cancer Foundation NZ



**Our vision is
zero deaths from
breast cancer in
New Zealand.**

We have a single-minded mission to achieve this by pushing for new frontiers in early detection, treatment and support.

Breast Cancer Foundation NZ was formed in 1994 to educate all New Zealanders about early detection and the importance of screening mammograms. Since 1996, the mortality rate for breast cancer has dropped by 37% thanks largely to free screening, greater awareness and better treatment.

Today our focus is on breast awareness and education, research and support. Our nurse educators speak to community groups and workplaces throughout the year. Our pink caravan tours the country with our breast nurses, spreading the word far and wide. We fund exciting, innovative research that could improve treatment and, one day, find cures. We also offer phone and online support, and fund counselling and rehabilitation to help New Zealanders affected by breast cancer.

As a charitable trust, we depend on the generosity and support of donors, volunteers and corporate partners to fund our vital work.

How we can help



Free advice line **0800 BC NURSE (0800 226 8773)**

For enquiries about breast health, breast cancer and support.



mybc is our free **online support** community for

New Zealanders affected by breast cancer www.mybc.care



Counselling sessions for people affected by breast cancer.

www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/counselling



Physio rehabilitation following breast cancer surgery.

www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/rehab



Lymphoedema therapy following breast cancer.

www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/lymphoedema



Patient information events and webinars

www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/patient-information-events



A clinical trials database with information on the current breast cancer trials in New Zealand and Australia.

www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/clinical-trials



Education and awareness

Order free resources www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/resources

Book a free education session breasthealth@bcf.org.nz

Can you help us?

We depend on the generosity and support of donors, volunteers and corporate partners to fund our vital work.

Fundraising activities in October (international Breast Cancer Awareness Month) include the annual Pink Ribbon Street Appeal, Pink Star Walk and various community events. In May, thousands of New Zealanders take part in Pink Ribbon Breakfasts to help raise vital funds.

You can get involved all year round.



Partner with us

The Pink Ribbon is the internationally recognised symbol of breast cancer and is trademarked to BCFNZ in New Zealand. It has 95% brand awareness, providing an effective platform for cause-related fundraising and corporate partnerships. Let's work together to improve the outcomes of people with breast cancer in New Zealand.



Get involved

Major community events like Pink Ribbon Breakfast and Pink Star Walk bring people together to raise funds and create awareness. If you're keen to run your own event, visit our website for ideas, including how to set up your own fundraising page.



Volunteer for the Pink Ribbon Street Appeal

The two-day street appeal in October is a major fundraiser and we need around 9,000 volunteer collectors. Many of our helpers are breast cancer survivors who want to spread the early detection message and support others with the disease. Sign up for whatever time you can spare!



Donate

To support our life-saving work, please visit our website to make an online donation, or set up a regular automatic payment. You may also like to consider leaving a bequest to us in your Will. Call us on **0800 902 732** to find out more.



Visit www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz to find out how you can help us achieve our vision. Freephone **0800 902 732**



**Breast Cancer
Foundation NZ**

Mammograms save lives through early detection of breast cancer.

Mā te kite wawe I te mate pukupuku I te whakaata ū, e ora ai te wahine.

Be breast aware from 20 - show changes to your doctor.

Kia mataara wāhine mā – me whakaatu ōu rerekētanga ki tō tākuta.

Reduce your risk - make healthy lifestyle choices.

Takahia ngā moreareatanga ki raro – Hikoia te ara ki te ora.

share knowledge. spread hope. save lives.

For free resources and information contact us **0800 902 732** or **breasthealth@bcf.org.nz** or visit **www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz**



BreastScreen Aotearoa.

Enrol for free screening mammograms from age 45-69 years, contact BreastScreen Aotearoa. Aged 70-74? Call to check.

Freephone **0800 270 200** or **www.timetoscreen.nz**



Need advice?

Call our breast nurse on **0800 BC NURSE** (0800 226 8773)



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