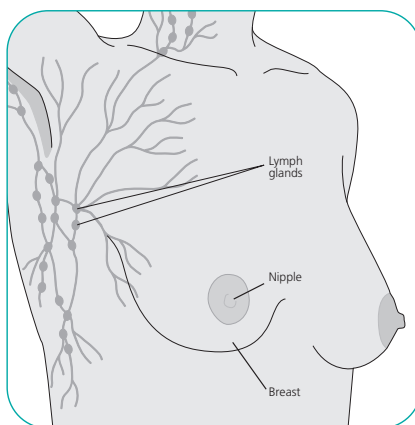


Breast cancer

Breast cancer is cancer of the breasts and can occur in men as well as women. A patient with symptoms of breast cancer should be referred by the GP to a team specialising in breast cancer.

Your GP should explain that treatments for breast cancer are very effective and help many people survive. The GP should be sensitive towards patients being referred for suspected breast cancer and discuss any specific information and support needs the patient may have.

The GP should encourage all patients, including women over 50 years old, to be breast aware¹. This should help avoid delays in people coming forward with symptoms. The GP should take a patient's history into account when making decisions about referral. For example, the GP might talk to a specialist and arrange referral for patients reporting a lump or other symptom that has been present for several months.



The breasts and lymph glands.

¹Breast awareness means knowing what your breasts look and feel like normally (see www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk for further information).

Urgent referral

Urgent referral should be made in patients:

- of any age with a separate, distinct, hard lump that is fixed, with or without dimpling of the skin (sometimes called skin tethering)
- aged 30 years and older with a separate, distinct lump that is still present after their next period, or occurs after the menopause
- aged younger than 30 years with a lump that is growing or has other features linked with cancer (such as being fixed and hard), or other factors such as family history²
- of any age, who have had breast cancer before, and have a new lump or other suspicious symptoms
- with eczema on one breast or a nipple change that does not get better when treated
- with a recent change in nipple shape
- with a bloody discharge from one nipple
- who are male, aged 50 years and older with a firm lump in one breast with or without a change in nipple shape or skin changes.

²NICE has published a guideline on familial breast cancer; it is available from www.nice.org.uk/page.aspx?o=203181

Non-urgent referral

Harmless lumps in people under 30 years of age are very common. Patients under 30 with a lump should be referred non-urgently by the GP.

The GP should also make a non-urgent referral for patients with breast pain and no other symptoms, when the first treatment that the GP offers doesn't work. A non-urgent referral should also be made if there are any unexplained persistent symptoms.

Tests

Where patients have symptoms suggestive of breast cancer, NICE recommends that tests should not be carried out before referral to a specialist.