



Early detection through mammography

Early breast cancer detection –
improved chances of recovery

What you should know about breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in Switzerland and the main cause of cancer deaths in women over 50 years. About 5,860 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and over 1,380 die of the disease every year. The chances of survival and recovery from breast cancer are considerably greater if cancer is diagnosed early and treated appropriately.

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. Mammograms can detect even very small tumours, long before they can be felt by hand or diagnosed as a result of other symptoms.

Who can take part in a screening programme?

All women over 50 who live in the canton Basel-Stadt (as well as cross-border commuters with Swiss health insurance) are entitled to have a screening mammography regardless of their nationality or residential status. All women aged 50 to 74 are invited for breast cancer screening every 2 years.

How should I prepare myself for a mammography?

- If you still have periods arrange a screening appointment at the beginning of your cycle when your breasts are less sensitive.
- A health questionnaire is enclosed with your invitation. Please fill it in and bring it to your appointment.
- Wear a top that is easy to take off as you will need to strip to the waist for the examination.
- Please do not use any deodorant, talcum powder, body lotion or perfume on your breasts or armpits the day of the examination.

What will happen during the examination?

- Even though the actual X-ray only takes a few minutes, you should allow about 20 to 30 minutes for the whole appointment.
- For an optimal X-ray, the radiographer will place your breast between the X-ray source and a plate for a few seconds. The procedure may feel unpleasant, but only lasts for a short while.
- The mammograms are evaluated by at least two radiologists, independent from each other. For that reason, there is no consultation with a doctor at the time of the examination.

When and how will I get the result?

You and the physician of your choice – if indicated on your health questionnaire – will be informed of the result in writing within eight working days.

When are further tests necessary?

- Most mammograms (95%) do not reveal any unusual findings, i.e. they are normal.
- In about 4–5% of mammograms, further examinations are needed – mainly ultrasound or special mammograms – to determine the nature of the findings. If the lesion is a benign change of breast tissue, you will receive a new invitation for a screening mammogram in two years time.
- The costs for any further examinations following screening mammography are covered by health insurance providers. However, any excess or deductible will apply.

The possible benefits and risks of breast cancer screening

A quality assured screening mammogram within a systematic program is the recommended method for the early detection of breast cancer in women aged 50–74 years and above. Age is the most important risk factor for breast cancer. As in any medical procedure, the possible benefits and risks must be balanced. The majority of health experts agree that in quality assured screening, the benefits outweigh the risks.

What are the benefits and risks, or potential harms of breast screening? It is your choice whether to participate in the screening program or not.

Possible benefits

Mammography allows **early detection of breast cancer**: even very small tumours can be detected that have usually not yet spread. Early detected cancers may lead to less aggressive treatments and therefore may improve the quality of life.

Early detection combined with effective treatment has reduced breast cancer mortality.

Women, participating in a breast cancer screening program are assured of the constantly monitored **high quality** of the examination.

Mammography costs as part of a screening programme are paid for under a person's obligatory Swiss health insurance (basic insurance), without any excess or deductible being applied.

Possible harms or disadvantages

Some breast cancers are diagnosed and treated that would never otherwise have been found in the woman's lifetime or caused them harm (overdiagnosis). At present it is not possible to predict the behavior of the cancer. Therefore all cancers are treated.

„Positive“ mammograms will be assessed by further medical examinations. If these tests show no breast cancer, the screening result is called „false positive“.

Breast cancer screening can miss cancers. If a breast cancer is found within two years after a screening mammogram, it is called an interval cancer. When a mammography result is normal, although breast cancer is present, the screening result is called „false negative“. These are relatively rare occurrences.

Screening may detect an advanced breast cancer where the course of the disease can no longer be influenced. In such an event, the woman has an impairment in her quality of life while knowing earlier of her breast cancer.

The risk from exposure to radiation for women aged 50 years and above is considered to be much lower than the benefits of screening. The harms of radiation exposure in women over 50 is outweighed by the benefits of screening.

It is important that you obtain all the information you can before you make a decision about participation. We will be pleased to provide you with a detailed information brochure. Any questions can be addressed to the breast cancer screening programme of your canton, the cancer hotline, cantonal cancer leagues or your attending physicians.

Screening mammography cannot prevent cancer. It is very important that women observe their breasts closely and consult a doctor if they notice any changes.

How do you make an appointment for the screening mammography?

- You can reply to our invitation: 50- to 74-year-old women will receive a written invitation every two years to make an appointment for a screening mammography; women aged over 75 years may also take part in the screening programme at their own request or on the recommendation of a physician.
- You can call one of the participating radiology institutes where you wish to have the mammography performed.
- You can make an appointment online: www.mammografiescreeningbasel.ch > Terminverwaltung
- Do you need help making an appointment? Then please call the programme centre of the Basel Cancer League directly on 061 319 91 70.
- Have your mammography now.

Make an appointment today.

Costs of the examination

Your basic health insurance will cover the costs, except for an excess of 10%, i.e. approximately CHF 20.– that you will have to pay and is not charged as part of the annual excess. The costs of further examinations after mammography in the Basel programme are also covered under a person's basic insurance. However, any excess or deductible will apply as normal.

Further information

www.swisscancerscreening.ch

A comprehensive information brochure is available in several languages and can be downloaded free of charge from www.mammografiescreeningbasel.ch:

 German

 French

 Italian

 English

 Albanian

 Macedonian

 Portuguese

 Spanish

 Turkish

 Serbo-croat-bosnian

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A Basel Cancer League programme on behalf of the canton Basel-Stadt.