



# Women and Cancer Prevention

## A cancer prevention plan for women

Finding cancer early offers one of the best chances to cure the disease.

Look for:

- Lumps, sores or ulcers that don't heal.
- Unusual changes in your breasts – lumps, thickening, unusual discharge, nipples that suddenly turn inwards, changes in shape, colour or unusual pain.
- Coughs that don't go away, show blood, or a hoarseness that hangs around.
- A loss in weight that can't be explained.
- Any loss of blood, even a few spots between periods or after they stop.
- Moles that have changed shape, size or colour, or an inflamed skin sore that hasn't healed.
- Blood in a bowel motion.
- Persistent changes in toilet habits.
- Persistent abdominal pain or bloating.

These symptoms are often related to more common, less serious health problems. However, if you notice any unusual changes, or these symptoms persist, visit your doctor.

## Check for early breast cancer

Have a free BreastScreen Australia mammogram (breast x-ray) every two years. Regular mammograms can reduce the number of women who die from breast cancer by 35 per cent. Screening mammograms look for early breast cancers in women without symptoms

BreastScreen Australia is a breast cancer screening program offering free screening mammograms to women aged from 40 years, specifically targeting women aged 50-69 years. To book your appointment with BreastScreen Australia phone 13 20 50

## Have a regular Pap smear

Have a Pap smear every two years from the age of 18, or within two years of becoming sexually active. Pap smears can detect early changes in cells of the cervix, so that they can be treated before cancer develops. Up to 90 per cent of cervical cancers can be prevented through regular Pap smears.

In Australia, women can access a vaccine that can protect against the cause of most cervical cancers, human papillomavirus (HPV). However, the current vaccines only target two thirds of the HPVs responsible for cervical cancers, therefore all vaccinated women will still need regular Pap smears.

There are currently no screening tests for ovarian, uterine, endometrial, vulvar or vaginal cancers. Fortunately, these cancers are very rare. Be aware of what is normal for you but if you notice any changes or symptoms that persist, visit your doctor.

## Ask about screening for bowel cancer

Early detection of bowel cancer greatly improves chances of successful treatment. Your risk of bowel cancer increases with age. If you are over 50 years, you should be tested for bowel cancer every two years. However, some people may have known risk factors which put them at increased risk. If you fall into this group your doctor will talk to you about regular surveillance.

The National Bowel Cancer Screening program started in 2006. It uses the faecal occult blood test (FOBT) to detect hidden blood in bowel motions. People without symptoms aged 50, 55 and 65 are eligible to participate. For more information on the NBCSP, please call 1800 118 868.

## Make lifestyle changes

We know that by being physically active every day, enjoying a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy body weight, you can lower your risk of developing cancer. We know that these factors account for at least 30 per cent of all cancers.

## Ways to reduce your cancer risk

- ✓ Stop smoking – lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in Australian women. If you are a smoker, attempt to quit. Call the Quitline on 13 QUIT (13 78 48) for free advice.
- ✓ Be SunSmart – protect yourself in the sun and take care not to burn.
- ✓ Stay in shape – aim for a healthy body weight.
- ✓ Move Your body – be physically active for at least 30 minutes on most or all days.
- ✓ Eat for health – choose a varied diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables and limit your intake of red meat.
- ✓ Avoid or limit alcohol – no more than two standard drinks a day (recommended by the National Health and Medical Research Council) and try one or two alcohol-free days a week.

Remember, if you have any concerns or questions, please contact your doctor.

## Where can I get reliable information?

**BreastScreen Australia 13 20 50**  
[www.breastscreen.info.au](http://www.breastscreen.info.au)

**National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre**  
[www.nbocc.org.au](http://www.nbocc.org.au)

**National Bowel Cancer Screening Program**  
**Information Line 1800 118 868**

**Cancer Council NSW 13 11 20**

**Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.**

[www.cancercouncil.com.au](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au)

**Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) 131 450**