

Breast cancer screening

Information about
the screening programme
in Geneva



depistage-ge.ch/documentation

Breast cancer: the figures

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women.

Every year in Switzerland, around 6,600 women develop breast cancer and 1,400 die from it.

A common cancer



1 in 8 women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime

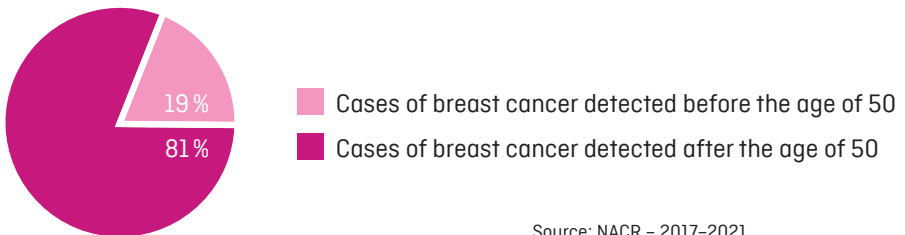
Source: Swiss National Agency for Cancer Registration (NACR – 2017–2021)

89% of women are still alive 5 years after diagnosis.

Source: [liquecancer.ch](https://www.liquescancer.ch) (2025)

Men can also develop breast cancer, but this is rare. In Switzerland, around 60 men develop breast cancer every year and 10 die from it.

The risk increases with age



Source: NACR – 2017–2021

What is breast cancer screening?

- Screening aims to detect breast cancer at an early stage, before symptoms appear, when it is easier to treat.
- **Screening is done by mammography.** This is a breast X-ray. Screening is recommended **every two years for women aged 50 and over.**

Benefits, disadvantages and limitations of screening

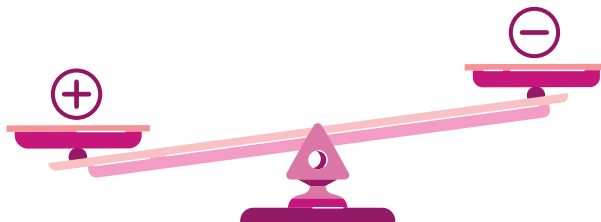
All medical examinations have benefits and disadvantages and this is the same for breast cancer screening (mammograms). Taking part in the screening programme is a personal choice. It is important to be informed so you can make a decision.

Benefits

- Mammograms can usually help to find cancer early. This often increases the **chances of recovery** and helps to reduce the risk of dying from breast cancer.
- If cancer is found early, **the treatment may be less extensive**.
- In the screening programme:
 - There are **strict quality standards**. This means that mammograms are read by two or three radiologists, helping to make the diagnosis more reliable.
 - **Ninety percent of the costs are covered** by basic health insurance. There is no deductible to pay.
 - Analysing the collected data helps to **improve knowledge about the effectiveness** of screening.

Disadvantages

- The examination may be **uncomfortable**. The breast is compressed between two plates for a few seconds to get a clear picture and minimise radiation exposure.
- Having mammograms and waiting for the results can cause **worry**.
- Mammograms expose you to a small amount of radiation but the health risks are negligible.
- A **false-positive** mammogram is where an anomaly is found on the mammogram but further tests prove that the anomaly is benign (not cancer). This is a false alarm.
- **Risk of overtreatment**. When cancer is diagnosed, it is difficult to predict how it will develop. This means that some tumours with very slow progression are treated as a precaution even though they would never have affected the patient's health.



Limitations

- Certain breast cancers are invisible on mammograms or develop between screening appointments. In some cases, a patient's cancer may therefore not be detected during a mammogram. This is why it is important to go for a mammogram every two years.
- Breast cancer screening does not stop breast cancer developing.
- Screening often detects cancer early, but some cancers remain difficult to treat.

Screening: who is it for and when should it be done?

Do you have any of these symptoms in one of your breasts?

	Yes	No
A lump	☐	☐
Persistent pain	☐	☐
Nipple discharge	☐	☐
A change in the skin or shape of the breast	☐	☐

Do you have a personal or family history of breast cancer?

	Yes	No
A personal history of breast cancer	☐	☐
A family history of breast cancer (parents, brother, sister, children)	☐	☐
A breast condition requiring follow-up	☐	☐
An increased genetic risk of breast cancer (e.g. BRCA)	☐	☐

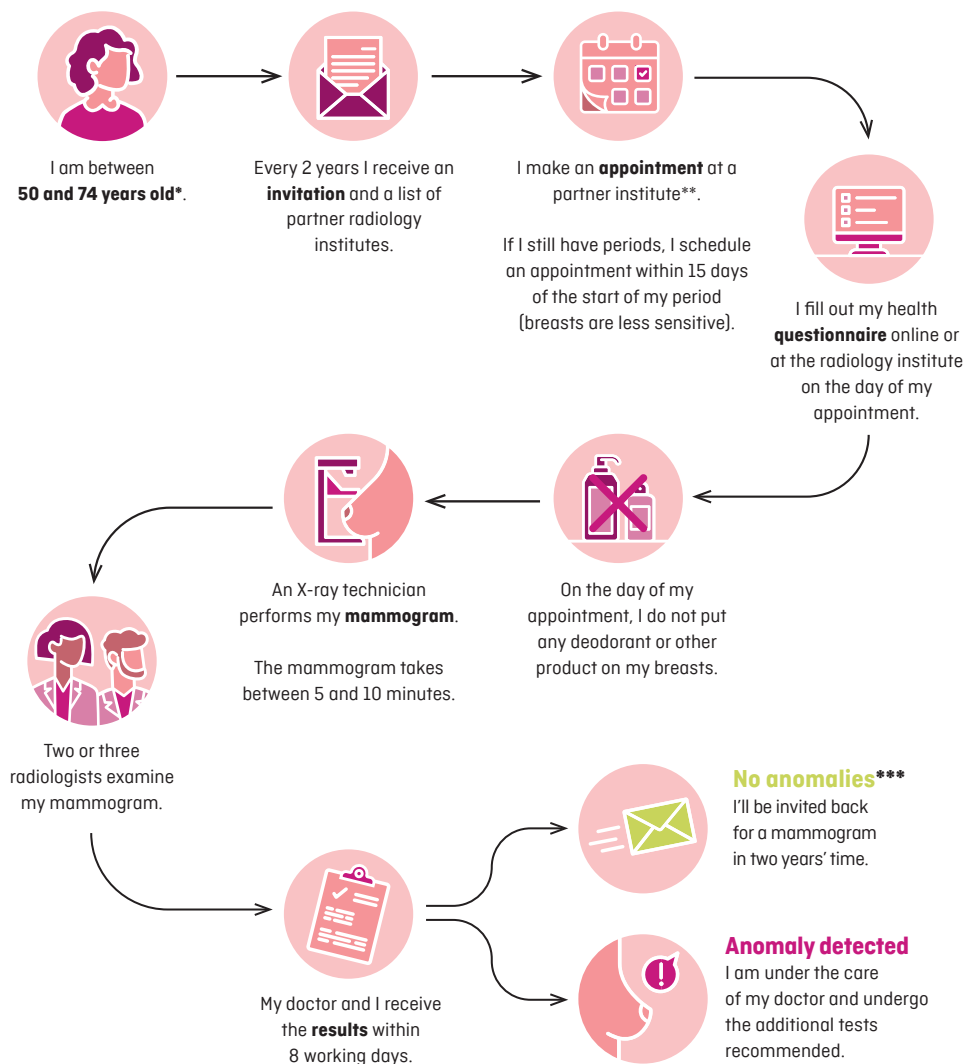
Did you answer **NO** to all the questions?

- ✓ You can have breast cancer screening as part of the programme if:
- You are a **woman aged 50 or over**;
AND
 - You live **in Geneva**, regardless of your nationality or residence permit; OR you are **a cross-border worker** currently working, or have previously worked, **in Geneva** and **insured under the Swiss Federal Law on Compulsory Health Care (LAMal)**.

Did you answer **YES** to one or more of the questions?

? **Talk to your doctor** to find out if the screening is right for you.

How does screening work for me as part of the programme?

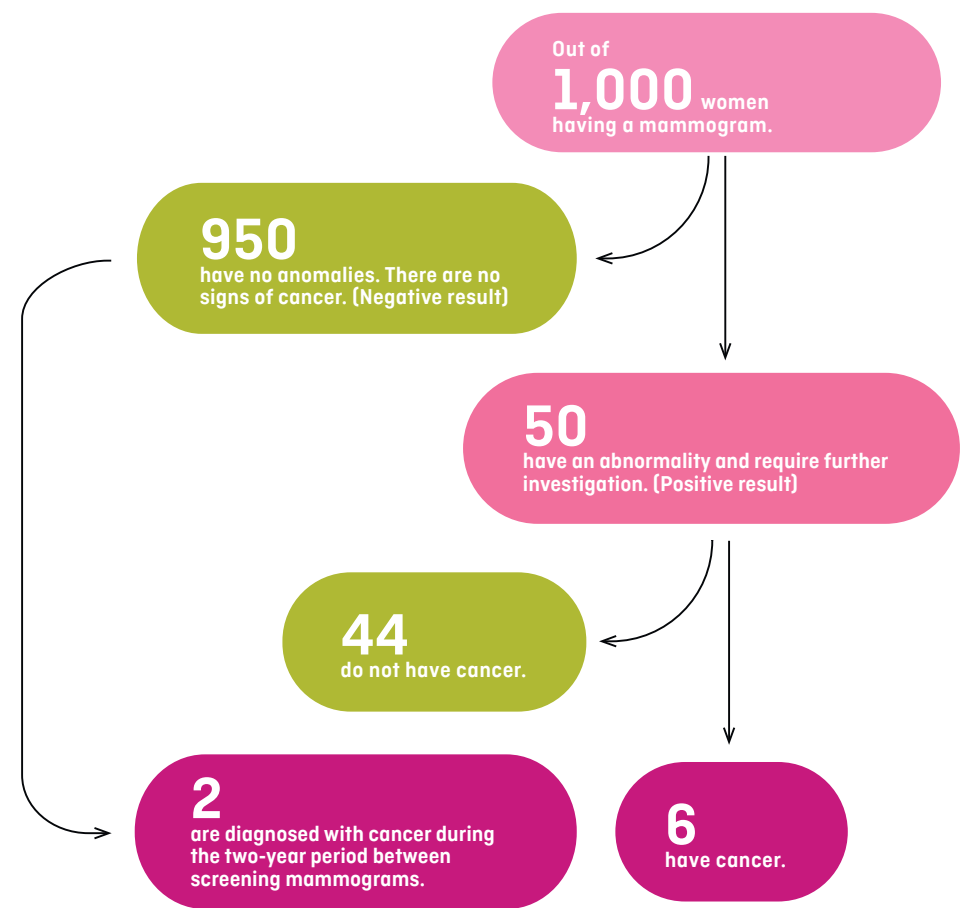


* After the age of 74, I no longer receive invitations for screening, but I can request a mammogram by contacting the programme.

** If I don't want my mammogram to be done by a male technician, I mention this when making the appointment.

*** In some situations, an additional examination may be recommended due to the images being difficult to interpret. This may be the case if you have dense breasts or prostheses.

What are the outcomes of the screening programme in Switzerland?

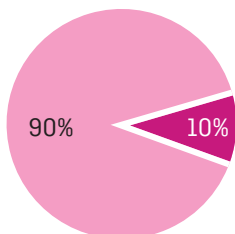


**I keep checking my breasts between mammograms.
I consult my doctor if I notice any unusual changes.**

Figures are rounded. Exact figures are available in the report: Braendle K, Zwahlen M, Bulliard J-L. Breast cancer screening programmes in Switzerland, 2019–2021. Lausanne, Unisanté – Centre universitaire de médecine générale et santé publique, 2024 [Raisons de santé 356].

How much does a mammogram cost for me in the programme?

Basic health insurance (LAMal) covers 90% of the total cost of a mammogram if it is performed as part of the screening programme.



The insurance company sends me an invoice for the remaining 10% (less than CHF 20). The exact cost can be found on the invitation letter and on the website depistage-ge.ch.

There is no deductible to pay.

Additional tests

If additional tests are required, they are done outside the screening programme. The costs are covered according to the usual terms of your contract.

Financial assistance

- Beneficiaries of a health insurance subsidy can ask for the 10% to be refunded. To do this, please send a copy of your subsidy certificate for this year together with your bank details to secretariat@fgdc.ch.
- Financial hardship should not deter you from taking part in the screening programme. If you are experiencing financial difficulties, please call us on 022 320 28 28.

Further information



depistage-ge.ch

For the sake of readability, this brochure uses the term “woman” irrespective of gender identity.

For more information, contact:

Programme cantonal de dépistage du cancer du sein - Genève

depistage-ge.ch - 022 320 28 28

Your doctor

Swiss Cancer Screening

swisscancerscreening.ch

Ligue genevoise contre le cancer

lgc.ch

Ligue suisse contre le cancer

liguecancer.ch



Dépistage du cancer
du sein Genève

Fondation genevoise pour le dépistage du cancer (FGDC)

Boulevard de la Cluse 43
1205 Genève
022 320 28 28
secretariat@fgdc.ch
depistage-ge.ch

Avec le soutien de la République et canton de Genève