

Breast cancer - common queries answered

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As part of your own breast awareness, you'll know what is normal for you, but understanding more about your breasts may help alleviate any worries you may have.

Below are a few of the most common breast health queries answered.

“My nipples are different sizes.”

It's not uncommon to have different sized nipples and breasts. Sometimes, this can't be attributed to any obvious reasons or health concerns. The body changes continuously because of age, hormones and other factors.

You should look for any discharge from your nipples, any red area that does not heal easily, any change in the nipple position, such as your nipple being pulled in or pointing differently, or a rash around their nipple. You should visit your GP if you spot these signs.

“Several family members have had breast cancer and I'm worried.”

In the UK there are medical guidelines to help decide which patients are most at risk and who should be referred for extra testing and screening.

If you are at all concerned, you should speak to your GP who will be able to discuss this with you in more detail. During your appointment, your GP will need details of your family members who have been affected, including their age and gender, so you should ensure that you take this information with you.

“I have silicone implants and I worry that I won't be able to feel any lumps or that mammograms won't see behind them.”

'Non cyclical' breast pain, the kind which doesn't vary with a menstrual cycle, may come from the breast tissue itself, or be getting pain 'referred' from the muscles, bones or joints of the chest wall.

Often the cause is not clear, but since there are several different treatments depending on what is found, it is recommended the member sees their GP.

“Several family members have had breast cancer and I’m worried.”

Breast implants can make detection of breast cancer a bit harder, but they do not increase the risk of getting cancer.

Detection difficulties depend on whether the implant has been put behind or in front of the chest wall muscle. The NHS breast cancer screening programmes states that a member should tell the technician doing the mammogram if they have implants; as a different technique needs to be used to see all of the breast tissue.

Even if a member has a mammogram, they should continue to be breast aware and examine their breasts regularly, reporting any changes or breast lumps to their GP immediately.

“My breasts ache and are tender before my period.”

Fluctuating hormone levels normally account for most premenstrual breast swelling and tenderness. A woman’s hormones rise and fall during a normal menstrual cycle. Oestrogen causes the breast glands to enlarge and progesterone causes the milk glands to swell - both these things may cause breast tenderness and swelling, typically between days 14 and 28 of a member’s menstrual cycle.

While most premenstrual breast pain and swelling is generally harmless, sudden or worrisome breast changes should be discussed with a GP as it could be signs of infection or other medical conditions.

PHC'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES

When you decide it's the right time for you to take the next steps, we're here for you. We offer a range of cancer support services that may be available to you as part of your healthcare cover with PHC. Find out more about what these services entail and how to access them.

Breast cancer self-referral service

A cancer diagnosis, or even just the prospect of one, can be an extremely stressful and worrying time for you and your loved ones, but you can take comfort in knowing we have expert support available to you. If you've spotted any changes to your breasts and are worried it may be cancer, we'll make sure you receive the tests you need, quickly. You won't even need to get a GP referral first*; all you need to do is call us.

How to access

Call the PHC claims line on **0800 068 7111** or email claims@thephc.co.uk.

Dedicated nurse service

If you're diagnosed with cancer we can put you in touch with our Dedicated nurse service, to answer any questions you have.

Access genuine help, support and understanding from friendly, qualified nurses.

How to access

Call the PHC claims line on **0800 068 7111** (9am to 8pm, Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm, Saturday) and a member of the team will put you in touch with a nurse on diagnosis. Outside these hours our experienced nurses provide support via our 24/7 health support line.

Check4Cancer

We work closely with our provider, Check4Cancer, to make sure you're seen quickly if you suspect cancer. They're experts in their field and have years of experience providing clinical advice and treatment.

Our in-house healthcare professionals also have extensive knowledge, insight and experience in helping members who are facing cancer. They'll be there to support you and your family from diagnosis, and throughout treatment. If required, contact our team, who will seek to pre-authorise your treatment in line with your available benefits.

