

Early Cancer Detection

There are 3 national screening programmes for early cancer detection in the UK

- Cervical cytology- smears
- Mammograms for breast cancer detection
- Bowel cancer screening: blood in your poo test

This year GPs have been set a target to improve our screening uptake figures. In our Practice approximately 75% of ladies have their smears and mammograms and 66% of you take part in the bowel screening; we want to improve all of these figures as it may just save your life.

Smears

These take place in women aged 25-64 years and are offered a smear every 3 years up until the age of 50 then every 5 years. These tests take place in the surgery, are done by a trained health care professional usually the Practice Nurse, takes about 5 minutes to do and results are sent directly to you at home in the post. It is not a painful procedure. Some women have personal reasons for not wanting a smear; please do talk to one of us, as we can hopefully reassure you and support you to have this test. The test looks for cell changes in your cervix (neck of the womb) which, if left untreated, could go on to develop into cancer.

Mammograms

These take place between the ages of 50-70 years and are offered every 3 years. This test is not carried out in the surgery but in a mobile breast unit that moves around the county and usually parks in one of the hospital car parks. Again, trained radiographers carry out the test which is quite uncomfortable as your breast is squeezed so that a good quality x-ray can be taken of the breast tissue. Whilst not the most comfortable test in the world it is over quickly; the whole thing taking about 10 minutes. This test picks up cancerous changes that are not palpable and in so doing, detects the cancer very early on, which means much better outcomes after treatment.

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Bowel screening

This is for everyone 60-74 years old. This is done in the privacy of your own home and is really easy to do and completely painless. It involves collecting a smear of poo and placing on a card which you receive through the post. The test looks for microscopic traces of blood in your poo which could indicate that you have a bowel cancer somewhere in your intestine. Again early detection=excellent outcome. For those of you aged 55 years, you will be offered a one off test which looks up into your bowel using a small telescope. This is slightly uncomfortable, but not painful, and involves you taking laxative to clear the bowel out beforehand but is again good for detecting early cancers that may not have declared themselves yet, and means you are ahead of the game before your screening starts at 60 years old.

This screening is very gender orientated but it's important that if you identify as trans or non-binary you should still be included and engage in the cancer screening programmes. You may want a more detailed discussion and I suggest you contact your GP to discuss how we can make things work for you.

These programmes do save lives and we are more than happy to discuss any concerns you may have on a one to one basis. Whilst this work was suspended during the lockdown, services are now restored. If you are eligible (within the right age brackets) you will be sent a screening invitation. We cannot screen people randomly or outside the criteria set by national bodies.

Here's a useful resource to explain more: [Cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/screening](https://cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/screening)

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