

What happens at a breast clinic?



This information is for anyone who has been asked to go to a breast clinic because of a change in their breast.

It is written by Breast Cancer Care, a charity that helps people who have breast cancer and other breast conditions.

You can also get Breast Cancer Care's longer free booklet **Your breast clinic appointment.**

What is in this information?

In this information, there are answers to lots of questions about what happens at a breast clinic. The questions are listed on the next three slides. Click on them to go straight to that section.

The breast clinic

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The breast clinic

How do I know if I have a problem in my breast?



There are two ways of finding out that you have a problem in your breast.

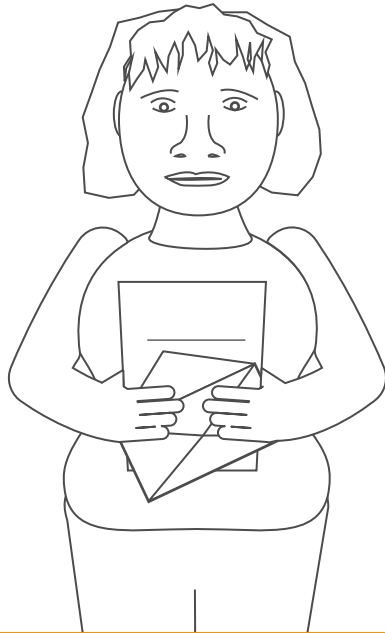
1. If you or someone close to you notices any unusual change in or around your breast.

If this happens, go to see your local doctor (GP) as soon as you can.

2. If your mammogram (breast x-ray) at a breast screening unit shows something unusual in your breast.

If you have a problem in your breast, it will need to be looked at by experts in case it is caused by breast cancer.

The breast clinic



Where will I go to find out more about the changes in my breast?

There may be changes in or around your breast that need to be looked at more closely. You will be asked by your GP or the staff at the breast screening unit to go to a breast clinic.

Some staff at the breast clinic might be men but a woman will be with you when you have your checks and tests.

Staff at breast clinics are experts in finding out if changes in your breast are caused by cancer. Most changes are not caused by cancer.

The breast clinic



What's the breast clinic like?

Breast clinics are usually in hospitals.

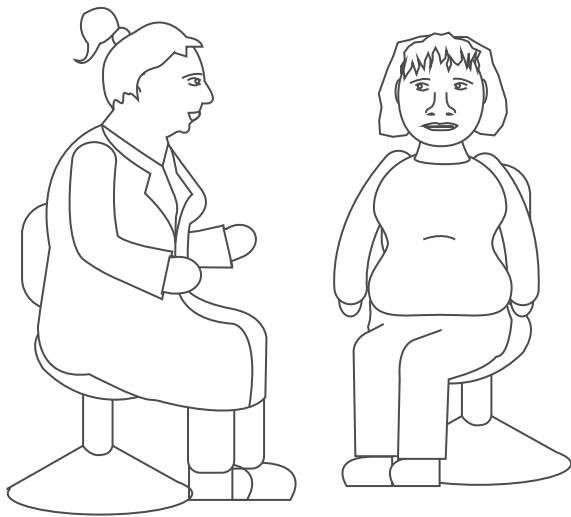
Your visit to the breast clinic might take several hours.

You can take somebody with you to the clinic if you want.

If you have trouble hearing, or understanding English, tell the clinic before you go there for your appointment.
You can ring them or ask someone else to ring the clinic for you.

The breast clinic

What questions will I be asked at the breast clinic?



The doctor or nurse might ask you about:

- anyone in your family who has had breast problems
- any other health problems you have
- any medicines you are taking at the moment.

The breast clinic

What checks and tests happen at the breast clinic?

The staff at the breast clinic will want to do some checks and tests to find out more about the changes in your breast. Here is a list of some of them.

- Breast examination.
- Mammogram.
- Ultrasound.
- Fine needle aspiration (FNA for short).
- Core biopsy.

Not everyone will need all the tests and checks in this list. Don't worry if you don't have all of them.

There is more information about these five checks and tests on the next few slides.

Tests and checks



What is a breast examination?

A breast examination is when a doctor or nurse looks at and carefully feels your breasts and the area around them.

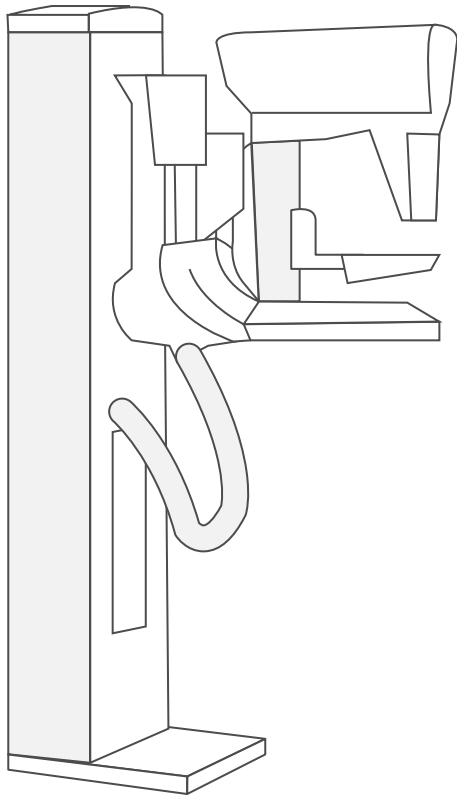
You will be asked to take all your clothes off your top half.

The doctor or nurse will feel your breasts when you are sitting down and while you are lying down. They will feel all the way up to your collarbone.

They will feel in your armpits because this is where there are glands called lymph nodes. Breast cancer can sometimes spread into your lymph nodes.

Tests and checks

What is a mammogram?



A mammogram is a picture of the inside of your breast. It is taken using x-rays.

The mammogram machine is large and is kept in a room on its own.

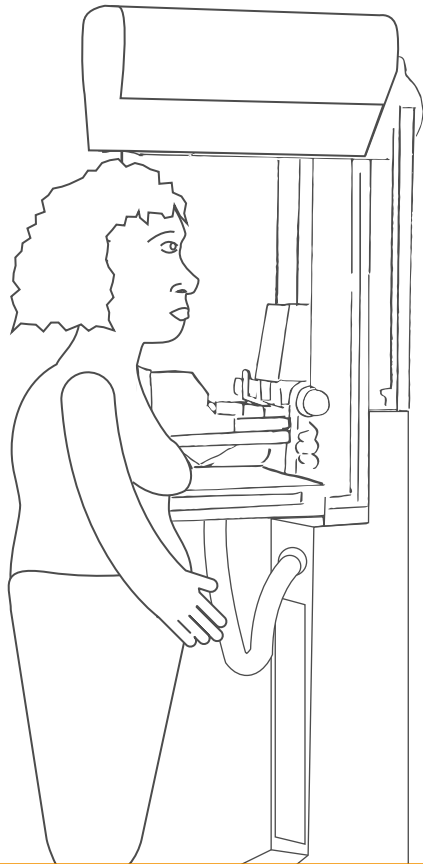
It has a flat shelf where your breast goes while the mammogram machine takes pictures.

It usually has handles to hold on to. The handles help you keep your arms out of the way.

The person taking the picture will be a woman.

Tests and checks

What happens during a mammogram?



Before a mammogram, you will be asked to take all your clothes off your top half.

You will be asked to stand in front of the mammogram machine.

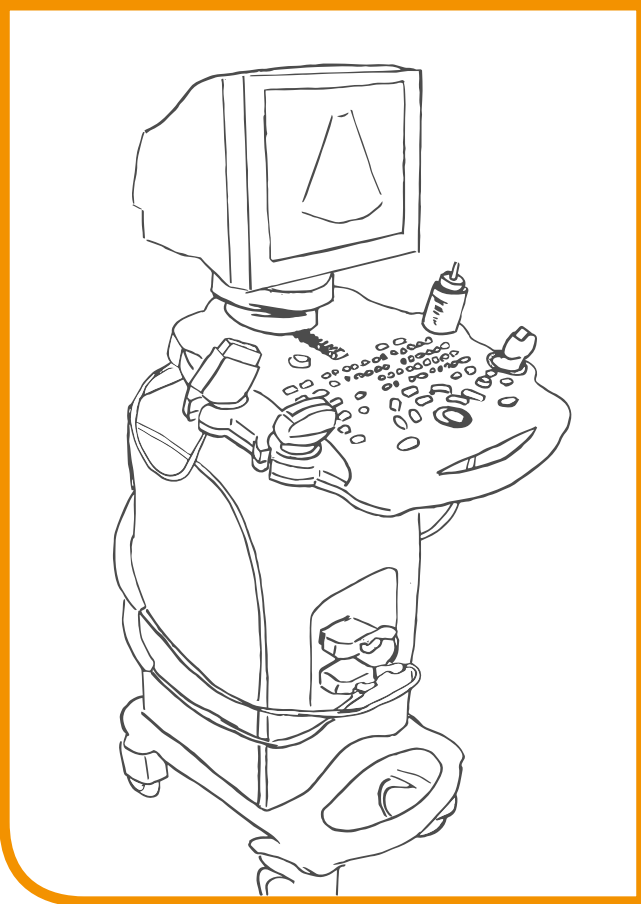
The woman taking the pictures will place your breast on the shelf and press it down firmly with a clear plastic plate. The plate holds your breast in the right place while the machine takes a picture.

Some people find the squashing between the shelf and the plate uncomfortable or even a bit painful. But it does not last long.

She will take two or three pictures of each breast.

Tests and checks

What is an ultrasound?



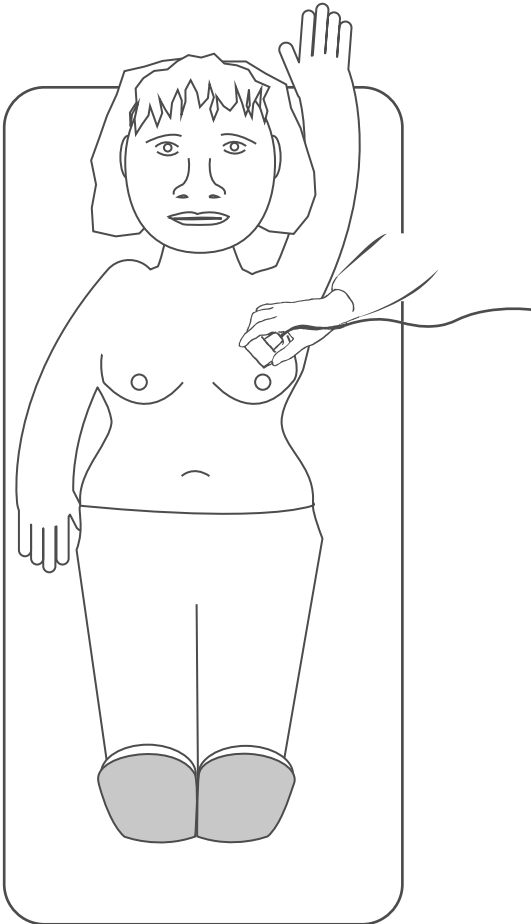
An ultrasound makes a picture of the inside of your breast using sound waves.

An ultrasound machine has a computer with a screen on the top. The screen shows a picture of the inside of your breast.

The person working the ultrasound machine sends pictures to the computer using a handheld device. This device is like a thick blunt pen. It is called a probe.

Tests and checks

What happens during an ultrasound?



Before an ultrasound, you will be asked to take all your clothes off your top half.

You will be asked to lie on a couch with your arm above your head.

The person doing the ultrasound will spread gel over and around your breast. They do this because the gel helps to get a clear picture.

The person doing the ultrasound will move the probe all over and around your breast. They will stop when they have seen what they need of the inside of your breast and they have a good picture.

It does not hurt.
It does not take very long.

Tests and checks

What is an FNA?

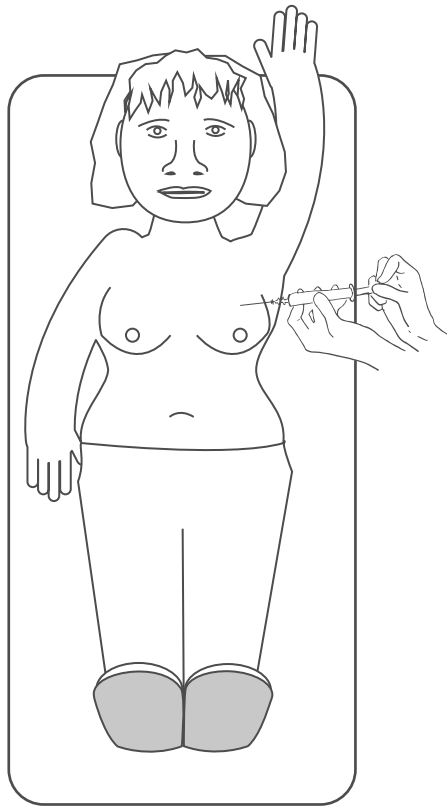
FNA – a short name for **fine needle aspiration** – is a way of taking a few cells from inside your breast using a syringe with a fine needle.

This is done when your mammogram and/or ultrasound pictures show something in your breast that needs to be looked at more closely.

The doctor or nurse doing the FNA will decide where they will take the cells from by looking at your mammogram and/or ultrasound pictures.

The cells taken are sent to be checked under a microscope to see if they are breast cancer cells.

Tests and checks



What happens during an FNA?

Before an FNA, you will be asked to take all your clothes off your top half.

You will be asked to lie on a couch.

The person doing the FNA will gently push a needle into your breast and pull out some cells using the syringe.

This might feel uncomfortable but it won't last for long.

When the needle is taken out, a sticking plaster will be put over the place where the needle went in. You can take it off again at the end of the day.

Tests and checks

What is a core biopsy?

Core biopsy is a way of taking out a small part of the inside of your breast through a small cut in your skin.

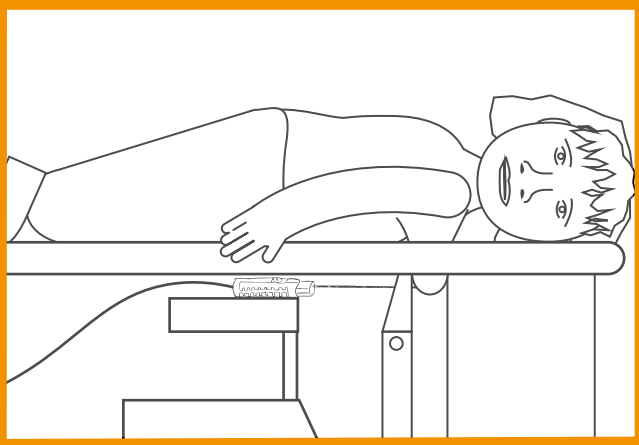
Core biopsy is done when your mammogram and/or ultrasound pictures show something in your breast that needs to be looked at more closely.

The doctor or nurse doing the core biopsy will decide which part to take by looking at your mammogram and/or ultrasound pictures.

The part that's been taken is sent to be checked under a microscope to see if it is breast cancer.

Tests and checks

Stereotactic core biopsy



Sometimes the person doing the core biopsy needs more pictures to get the needle to just the right place. They will use the mammogram machine for this.

This might be done lying down on a special table or it might be done while you are sitting.

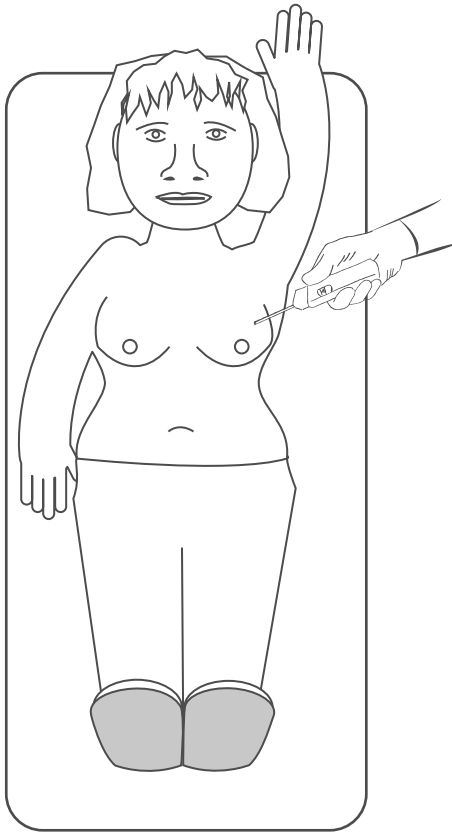


The mammogram machine will be linked to a computer to help guide them. This is called **stereotactic core biopsy**.

If you have a stereotactic core biopsy, your breast will be pressed in the mammogram plates while the core biopsy is taken. This can be a bit uncomfortable.

Tests and checks

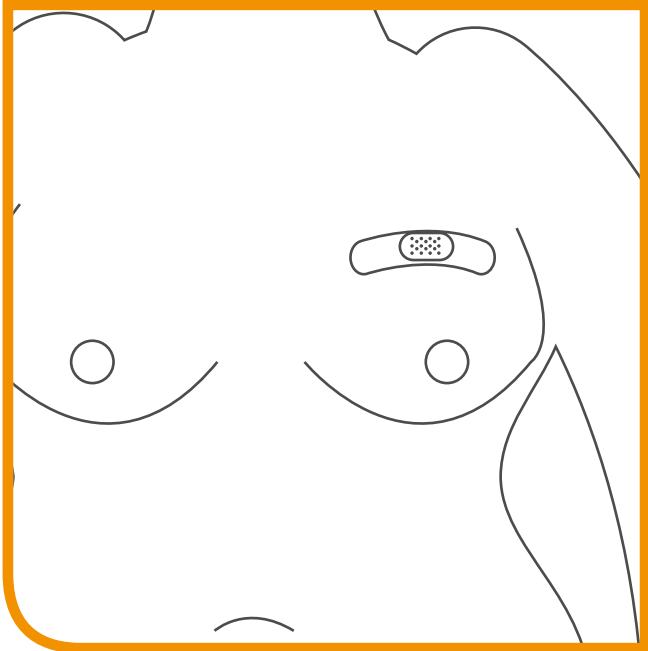
What happens during core biopsy?



Before a core biopsy, you will have an injection to numb the area. Then the doctor or nurse will make a small cut in your skin.

A needle will be pushed through the cut and a small part from inside your breast will be removed. You may hear a loud clicking noise.

Tests and checks



What happens after my core biopsy?

After the biopsy, the person doing it will put a plaster or other covering over the cut where the needle went in. They will tell you when you can take this off. It's usually after about two days.

Once the numbing injection has worn off, your breast might hurt. You might see a bruise on your breast.

If your breast hurts, you can take pain relief pills in the same way as you would if you had a headache.

Tests and checks

When will I know what my tests show?

Staff at the breast clinic will let you know when and how they will tell you what your tests show.

How long you have to wait is different for every breast clinic. Some clinics let you know on the same day.

Some clinics ask you to go back about a week later to find out what the tests showed.

A few clinics send you a letter or tell you by phone.

Tests and checks

More about what your tests show

It is a good idea to have a friend or someone from your family with you when you find out what your tests show.

Your tests might show the changes are not breast cancer

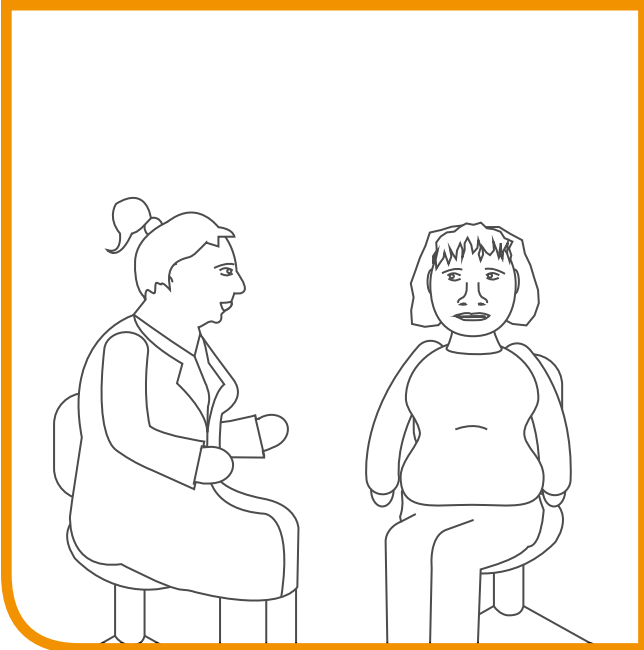
For most people the test will show you do not have breast cancer. Instead the changes in your breast will mean one of the two things below.

1. The changes in your breast are normal.
You will not need any treatment.

2. The changes in your breast are caused by something that is not cancer. This is called a benign condition. The doctor will tell you if you need any treatment.

If you have breast cancer

What if my tests show I have breast cancer?



If your tests show you have breast cancer, your doctors will talk to you about what treatments you could have.

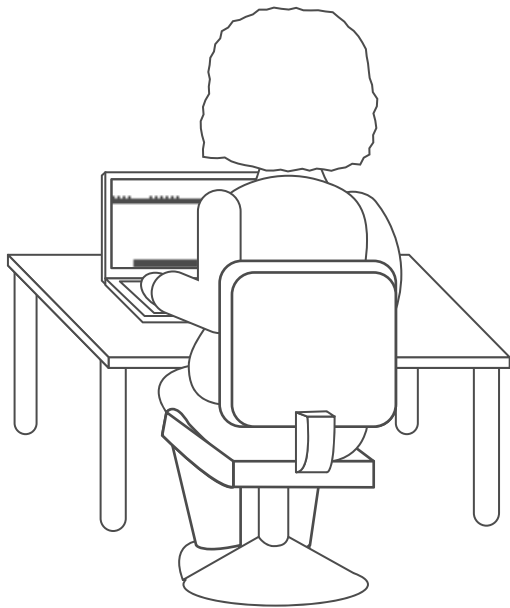
You might feel lots of different emotions. Shock, fear, anger, sadness and helplessness are common things to feel.

Sometimes it can be hard to understand what you are being told. If you have a friend or someone from your family with you, they can listen carefully and ask questions.

You will be put in touch with your breast care nurse, who will give you support and information while you are having treatment.

If you have breast cancer

Where can I find out more about breast cancer?



There are more details about what happens at a breast clinic in Breast Cancer Care's longer free booklet

Your breast clinic appointment.

There is lots of information about what happens next in Breast Cancer Care's longer free booklet **Treating breast cancer.**

You can see or order a copy of these booklets and others at www.breastcancercare.org.uk/publications

You can see lots of online breast cancer information on our website

www.breastcancercare.org.uk/breast-cancer-information

If you have breast cancer



Who can I talk to about my breast cancer?

You can talk to your breast care nurse at the breast clinic.

You can call Breast Cancer Care free for support and information on **0808 800 6000**.

The person who answers your call to Breast Cancer Care will be a nurse or someone else who knows a lot about breast cancer.

They won't tell anyone what you talked about.

About this information

What happens at a breast clinic? was written by Breast Cancer Care's clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer.



For a full list of the sources we used to research it:

Phone 0345 092 0808

Email publications@breastcancercare.org.uk



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