

Ontario's Breast Screening Program

Submitted by Irene Maurer

The facts about breast cancer

- Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in women
- 1 out of 10 women in Ontario will develop breast cancer
- as women get older, their chance of getting breast cancer increases
- studies show that deaths from breast cancer are reduced, by up to 40% in women 50 and older, by an organized screening program
- the Ontario Breast Screening Program will save more than 300 lives each year by recruiting at least 70% of Ontario women 50 years and older to the program

Who is eligible for screening?

- women who are 50-69 years old; if you wish to continue with screening after 69, please let us know
- you may be referred by your family doctor, or refer yourself directly
- studies show an organized breast screening program is not beneficial for women under age 50; these women are advised to consult their family doctor

What is breast screening?

- physical examination of the breasts
- information on breast self-examination
- screening mammography is a special x-ray of the breast to find cancer in its earliest stages, even before you feel a lump or any symptoms

What does physical examination involve?

- a nurse examiner will do a physical examination of your breasts and answer any questions you may have about screening
- physical examinations are important because a small number of breast cancers cannot be seen even on the best quality x-ray

How is a breast x-ray done?

- a breast x-ray involves placing the breast between plastic plates and applying some pressure to flatten the breast to get a clear x-ray picture

Will it hurt?

- some women may feel a little discomfort for a few seconds

"If you think it hurts to have a mammogram, let me tell you about having a breast removed. It hurts. It really hurts."

Betty Thompson
Breast Cancer Patient

Is mammography safe?

- modern mammography equipment uses very low doses of radiation; you would take the same amount of risk by smoking 3/4 of one cigarette in a lifetime
- the benefits of being screened for breast cancer far outweigh any risk of harm from the x-ray

What happens after the screening visit?

- nine out of ten women will have normal findings; a letter is sent to both the woman and her family doctor with the results
- women with abnormal results are referred to their family doctor or an assessment centre for additional investigation

How often should a woman be screened?

- you should come for screening every two years from the age of 50 to 69
- if you find anything unusual with your breasts at any time, you should contact your family doctor immediately; do not wait until your next appointment at the screening centre

Is there a charge for screening?

- no, there is no charge for this service
- the Breast Screening Program is an early detection program of the Ontario Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation, which is funded by the Province of Ontario

For information on the Ontario Breast Screening Centre nearest you, call:

Hamilton-	(416)389-0101
Kingston-	(613)384-4284
	or 1-800-465-8850
London -	(519)432-0255
	or 1-800-461-0640
North York-	(416)-512-0601
Ottawa-	(613)728-0777
	or 1-800-465-6226
Scarborough-	(416)298-2626
Sudbury-	(705)675-2283
	or 1-800-661-8897
Thunder Bay-	(807)343-1610
Toronto-	(416)928-1379
Windsor-	(519)253-0903

Eventually, there will be approximately 36 screening centres across Ontario, and mobile screening units in the Northern areas. The Hamilton Breast Screening Centre opened June 1, 1991. Seven cancers were found in the first 1,000 women screened.

Getting the message to the women of Ontario that this service is available is the major challenge currently facing the Breast Screening Program. After reading this, let others know around you - your family, friends, neighbours, other organizations. **DO IT! PHONE NOW.**

Merle Kisby, Health Promotion Coordinator from the Ontario Breast Screening Program, would be happy to address your group. Contact him at (416)423-4240, or Irene Maurer at (519)846-0207, for more information.

Irene Maurer is the Guelph Area President of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario and is a member of the Ontario Breast Screening Program Provincial Coalition.