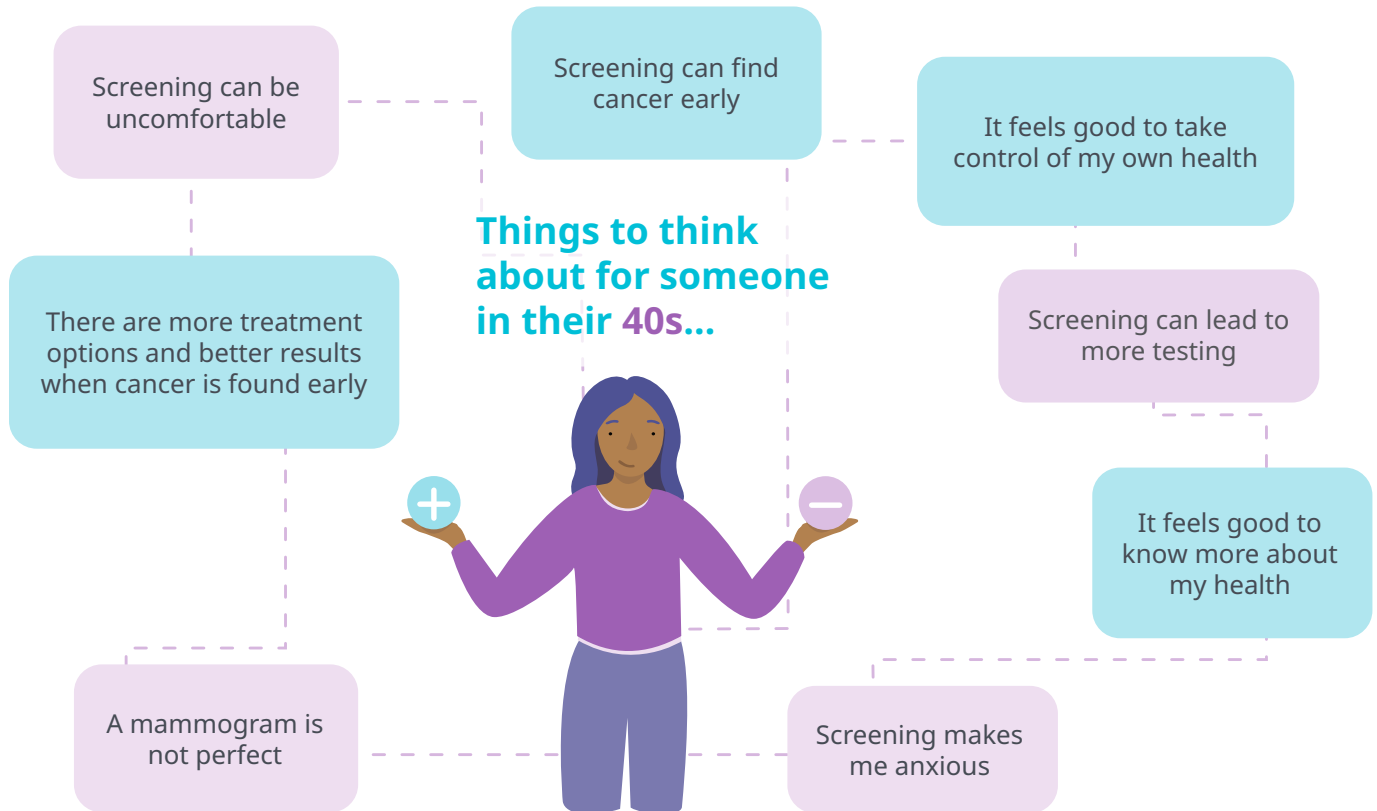


Should I start getting screening mammograms if I'm in my 40s?

Mammograms (x-rays of the breasts) can help find breast cancer early, before you notice any changes and when it is easier to treat. Your age and family history (if your parent, child or full sibling has had breast cancer) can affect your risk.



Why is it important to make an informed choice?

In BC, mammograms are available starting at age 40 to most women and many Two-Spirit, transgender and non-binary people, who have no symptoms. Generally, people between 40 and 49 have a lower risk than those over 50. So it's your choice whether to start now or wait. This guide helps you decide what's best for you.



Important: If you:

- **Have a previous history of breast cancer:** See a health care provider to arrange appropriate diagnostic breast imaging.
- **Have breast implants:** See a health care provider to arrange appropriate diagnostic breast imaging.
- **Have breast cancer symptoms, such as a lump, fluid from your nipple(s) or any other changes to your breast(s):** See a health care provider right away. You may need diagnostic testing.
- **Are pregnant or breastfeeding:** You can get a screening mammogram 3 months after you fully stop breastfeeding. See a health care provider right away if you notice any change(s) to your breast(s), since they can refer you for a diagnostic mammogram.
- **Have had a mammogram on both breasts in the last 12 months:** You must wait at least 1 year before having another screening mammogram.
- **Have a parent, child or full sibling who has or had breast cancer:** You should have a screening mammogram every year. Call 1-800-663-9203 to make an appointment (a referral is not required).

Benefits and limitations

Think about the benefits and limitations of mammograms. Check off the points that matter to you. Add any other points in the blank rows.

Benefits	Limitations
<p>Helps find cancer earlier: A mammogram can find cancer when it is small, which means more treatment options and a higher chance of success. Finding and treating cancer early gives me more time and energy to spend with family and friends. <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>A mammogram is not perfect: It can miss some cancers due to its location or the density of my breast tissue (false negative), or it can find cancers that would not have caused problems in my lifetime (overdiagnosis). <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Since I am younger, I may have denser breast tissue, so my screening mammogram may be less exact.</p>
<p>May help me live longer: Having a mammogram can help me live longer since screening can help find cancer when it is smaller and easier to treat. <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Screening anxiety: I may feel anxious, worried or stressed during my mammogram and after when I wait for my results. <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Feels good to take care of my health: A mammogram helps me look after my breast health so that I stay aware of my overall health. Having a mammogram lets me take care of myself and that feels good. <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Pain: Having a mammogram can be uncomfortable due to the pressure placed on my breast while the x-ray images are being taken. Compression is needed to spread the breast tissue and keep my breast in place to avoid blurry images. <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Gives me peace of mind: Knowing whether or not I have breast cancer will help me better understand my health and guide my choices for the future. <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>More testing: I may need more testing after my screening mammogram, such as a diagnostic mammogram, ultrasound or biopsy, to look more closely at my breast(s). <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Less treatment/Faster recovery: Finding cancer earlier may mean I will need less treatment and spend less time recovering. <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Possible treatment: I may need treatment after my screening mammogram, such as surgery, medications, radiation therapy and/or chemotherapy. <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/></p>

Why is screening available starting at age 40 but recommended at 50?

Your age and family history can affect the results of your next mammogram. As you get older, your risk of cancer goes **up** but your risk of a **false alarm** or **biopsy false alarm** goes **down**.

Definitions

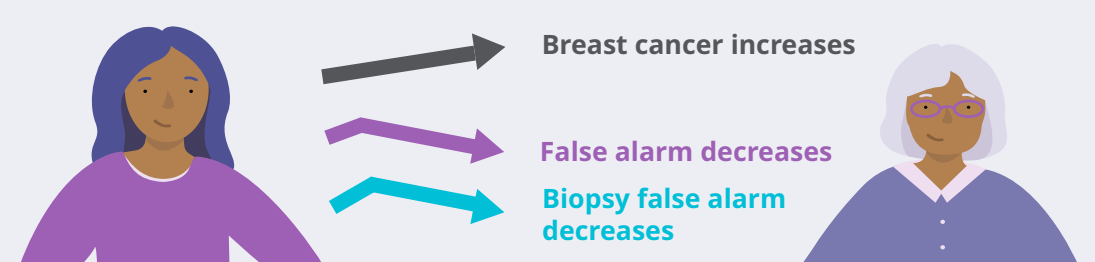
False alarm

An abnormal test result that's actually normal after more testing (such as other imaging, biopsy or surgery).

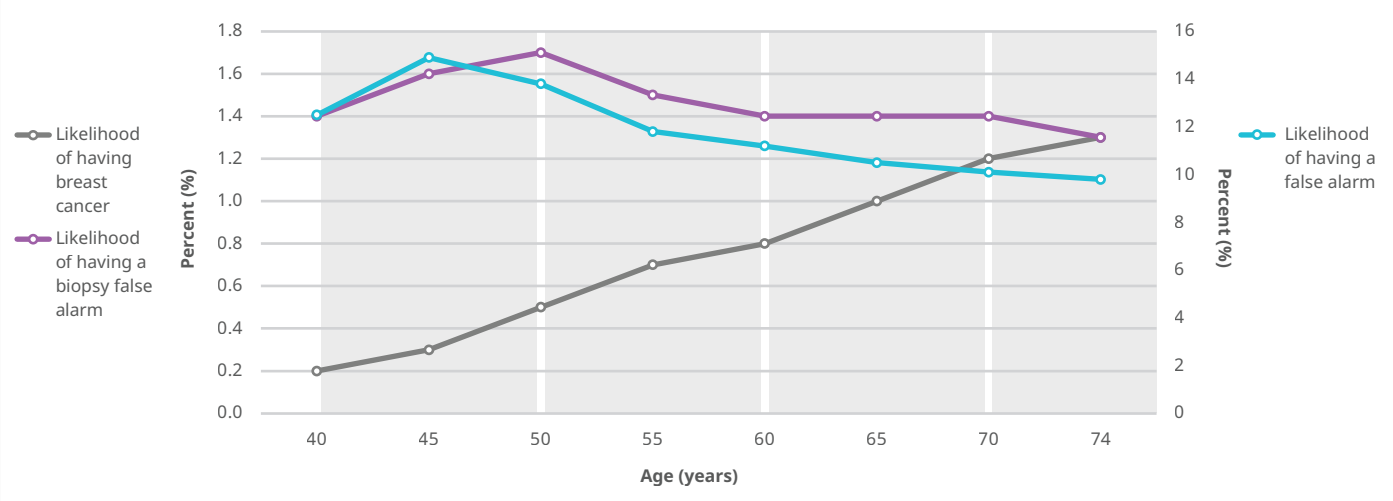
Biopsy false alarm

An abnormal result from taking a biopsy (removing a small amount of tissue, cells or fluid from the body) that's actually normal after more testing.

As you age,
your chances
of...



What can happen if you DO NOT have a parent, child or full sibling with breast cancer:



Understanding the graph:

If you are **45 years old**, you have:

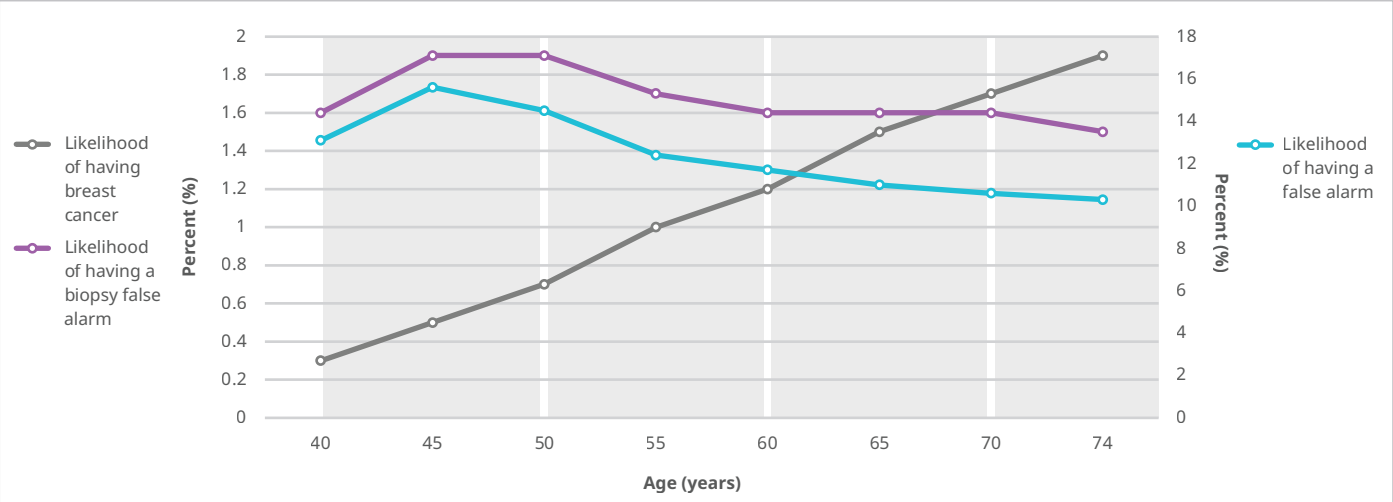
- Less than 1% chance of having cancer
- 15% chance of a false alarm
- 1.6% chance of a biopsy false alarm

Versus

If you are **70 years old**, you have:

- Over 1% chance of having cancer
- 10% chance of a false alarm
- 1.3% chance of a biopsy false alarm

What can happen if you DO have a parent, child or full sibling with breast cancer:



Understanding the graph:

If you are **45 years old**, you have:

- 0.5% chance of having cancer
- 16% chance of a false alarm
- 1.9% chance of a biopsy false alarm

Versus

If you are **70 years old**, you have:

- 1.7% chance of having cancer
- 11% chance of a false alarm
- 1.6% chance of a biopsy false alarm

Your decision

What is your decision?

- I want a mammogram now
- I want to wait until I turn 50
- I'm still not sure

Are you sure of your choice?

		Yes	No
Sure of myself	Do you feel sure about the best choice for you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understand information	Do you know the benefits and limitations of screening?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Risks and benefits	Are you sure about which benefits and limitations matter most to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encouragement	Do you have enough support and advice to make an informed choice?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Still not sure?

Take this guide to a health care provider for support. Write down any questions you may have below to ask them at your appointment:



Disclaimer

Information shared here is for informational purposes only. It should not be interpreted as medical advice, professional diagnosis, or medical opinion without first seeing a health care provider. This information should not replace the need to see a health care provider for any health-related concerns.

References

1. Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. (2022). Should I Continue Having Mammograms? For Women Age 75 to 84 Years. Boston. Available at https://eprogno-sis.ucsf.edu/decision_aids/Mammography_75-84.pdf.
2. Cancer Care Ontario. Cancer Fact: My CancerIQ – cancer prevention goes digital in Ontario. February 2015. Available at <https://www.mycanceriq.ca/>.
3. Légaré F, Kearing S, Clay K, Gagnon S, D'Amours D, Rousseau M, O'Connor A. Are you SURE?: Assessing patient decisional conflict with a 4-item screening test. *Can Fam Physician*. 2010 Aug;56(8):e308-14. PMID: 20705870; PMCID: PMC2920798.