

Patient information for urgent breast unit referrals

This information sheet explains why your GP has referred you to hospital and what you need to do

Why have I been referred urgently to a breast unit?

Your GP feels your breast symptoms need further investigation to rule out the possibility of cancer. Your GP has followed National Guidelines, which are in place to ensure that patients are seen as quickly as possible.

Does this mean I have breast cancer?

Having an urgent referral does not necessarily mean you have cancer. Most people who have an urgent referral don't have cancer. However, you have been referred because you need to see a specialist or have some investigations quickly to help find out the cause of your breast symptoms. In the event that cancer is diagnosed, then an early diagnosis means treatment is likely to be more effective. Therefore, it is important that you are seen within two weeks of the referral being made.

What do I need to do?

- Make sure your GP has your correct address and telephone number including a mobile number if you have one.
- **This is referral is urgent. Please ensure you are available within the next 14 days** for an appointment. If you are unable to attend an appointment within the next two weeks, please tell your GP.
- If you need a translator, have access needs or would like a female consultant, please let the hospital know before your appointment.
- Once you have agreed your urgent appointment, it is important that you attend it, so that your care is not delayed.
- Please let the hospital know immediately if you are unable to keep your appointment and an alternative can be arranged.
- If you do not attend your hospital appointment on two occasions, you will be referred back to your GP. This is so someone else can have the appointment.

What will happen next?

The breast unit within the hospital will inform you of your appointment either by post, by telephone or text. If you have not heard from them within a week of seeing your GP please contact your GP practice. Or, if you know the hospital where you have been referred, you can contact their [Patient Advice and Liaison Services \(PALS\) department](#).

You may want to bring a friend or family member with you to appointments, as it may be helpful for support or if you have concerns about understanding what the medical team will discuss with you. Please check your appointment letter for guidance about visitors.

What will happen at my appointment?

When you arrive at the breast clinic you should register at the reception. You will then be seen by a doctor or a nurse who is a specialist in breast diseases and who will listen to any concerns you may have. They will ask about your symptoms, examine you and arrange some tests. The breast team will aim to undertake all tests on the same day as the appointment and therefore you need to allow three hours for the appointment.

Your visit will consist of three parts:

1. Meeting your doctor or nurse to discuss your symptoms and to have a physical examination.
2. Imaging of the breast(s). The type of imaging test required is normally dependant on age. For women over 40 years old this is usually done with a mammogram (an x-ray of the breast). An ultrasound scan (a probe covered in warm jelly which is run over the breast) may also be necessary. For women under 40 years old, an ultrasound scan alone is normally advised. Occasionally women under 40 years old will require a mammogram.
3. A biopsy (small sample of breast cells or tissue) may be performed depending on the results of your examination and imaging. The doctor/nurse will explain more about this procedure on the day.

During your appointment you will be asked to undress from the waist upwards and therefore we recommend you wear separates such as a top with a skirt or trousers. Deodorant and talcum powder may affect the quality of a mammogram, so please do not use them on the day of your appointment. Alternatively, you can wash them off should you require a mammogram.

When will I get my results?

The results of the imaging (mammogram and/or ultrasound scan) are usually available when you are in the clinic. If you have a biopsy you will be asked to return for the results approximately the following week.

Any questions?

If you have any concerns or questions about your referral to hospital, please contact your GP.

Further Information

You may wish to access the website below for more details of the procedures and appointment information or ring the Breast Cancer Now helpline on 0808 800 6000.

Breast Cancer Now <https://breastcancernow.org/information-support/facing-breast-cancer/mammogram-breast-ultrasound>

This leaflet was updated by the London Patient Groups and Transforming Cancer Services Team for London.

An approximate timeline for your investigations and results are given below but may be longer if your symptoms are complex or you require multiple tests.

