

# Your body, Your health, Your choice.

A guide to three important health checks for women.



**BREAST  
SCREENING**



**CERVICAL  
SCREENING**



**MENOPAUSE  
& PERIMENOPAUSE**

**What each check is, what to expect,  
and where to find support in Redbridge.**

# How to use this guide

**This guide is for everyone — whatever your age, background, language or ability.**

You can read it from start to finish, or jump straight to the section that matters to you.

It has been produced following feedback from our Women's Health Project about what women told us they wanted to know.

Each section tells you:

- ✓ What the health check is and why it matters
- ✓ What to expect at your appointment
- ✓ Your rights and how to get support

If you need this information in another format — large print, easy read, another language — contact Healthwatch Redbridge.

## Inside this guide

**Cervical screening — page 3**

**Breast screening — page 6**

**Perimenopause and menopause — page 10**

**All three are free on the NHS.**



# Cervical screening

## What it is, what to expect, and how to get support

### What is cervical screening?

- Cervical screening (sometimes called a smear test) is a free health check. It looks for changes in the cells of your cervix — the opening to your womb.
- It is not a test for cancer. It is a way to spot any early changes before they become a problem.
- Finding changes early means they can almost always be treated easily.

### Who is invited?

- Women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 are invited.
- If your result is normal, you will be invited every 5 years instead of 3.
- You may also be able to do a home testing kit.
- You do not need to have had sex to have a cervical screening.

**HPV (human papillomavirus) is a very common virus. Most people have it at some point and clear it on their own. Having HPV does not mean you have cancer.**

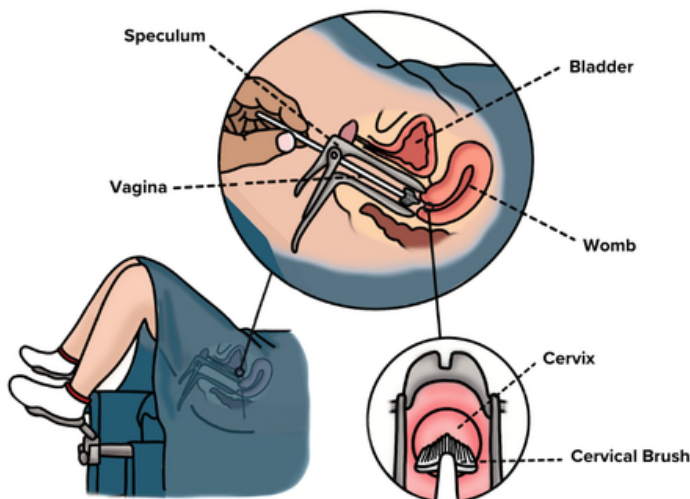
# What happens at a cervical screening appointment?

## Here is what to expect, step by step:

1. The nurse or doctor will ask a few questions about your health.
2. You will be asked to undress from the waist down. You will be given a sheet to cover yourself.
3. You will lie on an examination bed. It is normal to feel embarrassed — this is completely understandable.
4. The nurse uses a small tool called a speculum and a tiny brush to gently collect a sample from your cervix.
5. It may feel a little uncomfortable. You can ask to stop at any point. Tell the nurse how you are feeling.
6. The sample is sent to a lab. You will get a letter posted with your results.

## What about the results?

Most results are normal, and you will be invited back in 3 to 5 years. If the result shows changes, you may be asked to come back for more tests. This does not mean you have cancer — treatment at this stage is simple and very effective.



# Cervical screening - your rights

You have the right to:

- Ask for a female nurse or doctor
- Bring someone with you to your appointment
- Ask for a smaller speculum if you are worried about discomfort
- Request an interpreter or translated information
- Stop the test at any point
- Ask for a longer appointment if you have additional needs

## Home testing kits

From 25 August 2026 the NHS has offered home testing kits for cervical screening. It is invitation-only, for women and people with a cervix aged 30 to 65 who have not attended after previous invitations.

You will be invited by NHS App, text, email or letter, and can order a free kit through the App. You take your own sample with a swab and post it back free. If any changes are found, you will be invited for a follow-up appointment with your GP.

Home kits do not replace screening with a nurse or doctor. They are an extra option if you find it hard to attend.

## Notifications via the NHS App

- The NHS now sends cervical screening reminders through the NHS App.
- You will get a notification first, then a text, then a letter.
- Download the NHS App or ask your GP for more information.



# Breast screening



**What it is, what to expect, and how to get support**

## What is breast screening?

Breast screening uses an X-ray called a mammogram to look for changes in your breasts that are too small to feel.

It can find cancer early — when it is much easier to treat.

## Who is invited?

- Women aged 50 to 71 who are registered with their GP as female.
- You will be invited every 3 years by letter.
- Women outside this age group can self-refer — ask your GP.
- Redbridge's coverage rate is 58.9%\* — one of the best in North East London. But there is still more we can do.

\*National screening information provided to Redbridge Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2024)

# What happens at a breast screening appointment?

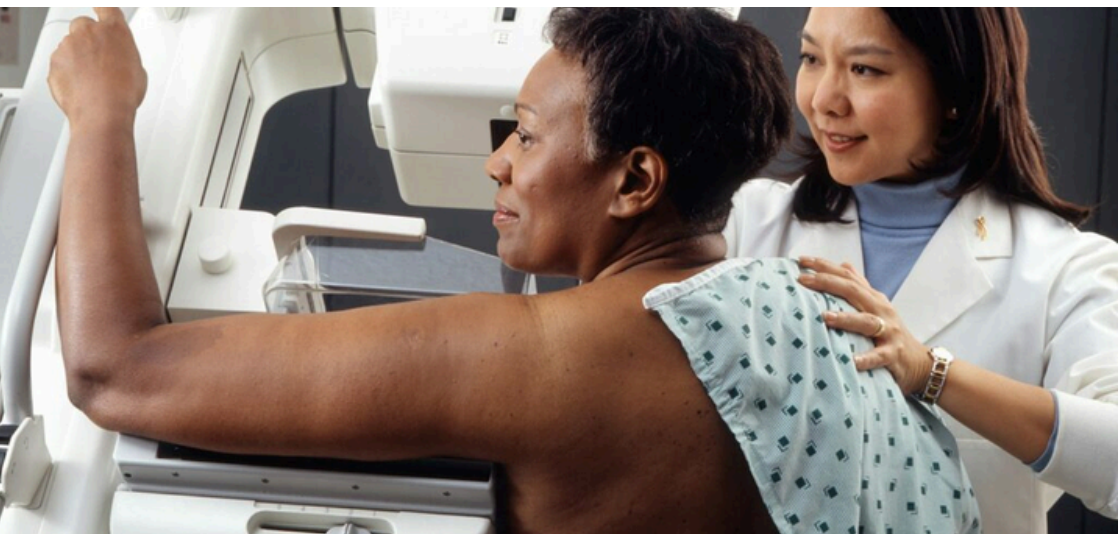
## The appointment usually takes about 30 minutes:

1. You will be asked to undress from the waist up and will be given a gown or cover.
2. A radiographer — the health professional trained to carry out mammograms — will gently position your breast between two flat plates.
3. The plates will press together to take clear X-ray images. This can feel uncomfortable or briefly painful.
4. This is repeated for both breasts, usually taking two images of each.
5. You will receive a letter with your results within a few weeks.

**It is normal to find the test uncomfortable. But if it is very painful, tell the radiographer — they can adjust the position.**

## What about the results?

Most people get a normal result and are invited back in 3 years. If you are called back for more tests, try not to worry — this happens to about 1 in 25 women, and most turn out to be fine.



# How to check your breasts yourself

**You do not have to wait for your screening appointment. Getting to know how your breasts normally look and feel means you will notice any changes more quickly.**

- Check your whole breast, armpit and upper chest area.
- Look in a mirror as well as feeling with your hands.
- If you notice any lump, change in shape, skin dimpling, nipple changes or unusual pain, contact your GP promptly.



A change in the size, outline or shape of your breast



A discharge of fluid from either of your nipples



Changes in your skin such as puckering, dimpling, colour or a rash



Any change in nipple position (pulled in or pointing differently)



A new lump, thickening or bumpy area in one breast or armpit



Swelling in your armpit, collarbone or breasts



An eczema like rash, crusting, scaly, itching or redness on or around the nipple



Breast pain is **not** usually a symptom of breast cancer

**! Do not wait for your next screening appointment if you notice anything**

- If you notice any change in your breasts at any time, see your GP straight away.
- You do not need to wait for a letter or be within the eligible age range.

# Breast screening - your rights

- You can ask for a female radiographer.
- You can ask to bring someone with you — even if the letter says otherwise, contact the unit to explain your needs.
- You can ask for a longer appointment if you need more time.
- If the venue is not accessible, contact the screening unit or your GP to ask about alternative locations.
- You can request information in another language or format — easy read, large print, audio.
- If you do not receive an invitation but are aged 50–71, contact your GP.

## Sue's House — free local support

Based in Ilford, Sue's House offers free counselling, complementary therapies, and wellbeing support for people affected by cancer.

Open to patients, ex-patients and families. Since 1984.

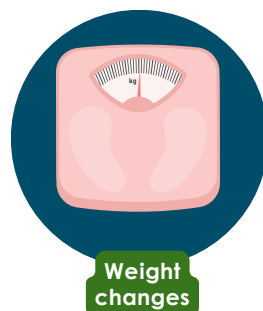
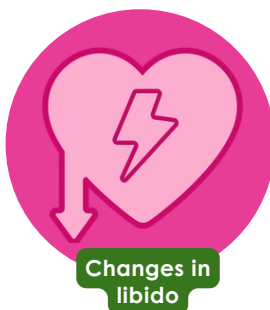
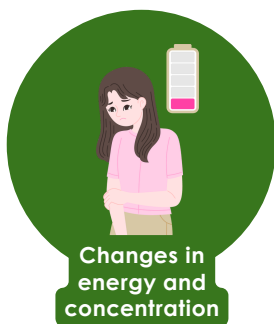
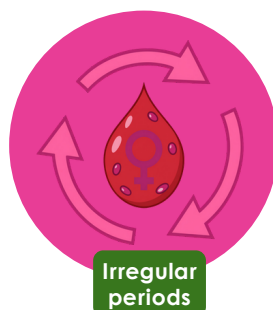
[www.sueshousecharity.org](http://www.sueshousecharity.org)



# Perimenopause & menopause

Menopause is when your periods stop permanently, usually between the ages of 45 and 55. Perimenopause is the time leading up to it, when hormone levels begin to change — often years before your periods stop. Everyone's experience is different. If symptoms are affecting your life, you deserve support.

**Common symptoms include:**



# Getting menopause and perimenopause support

**The first step is usually talking to your GP.**

- Describe your symptoms clearly — you can make a list before you go.
- If you feel dismissed, you are allowed to ask for a second opinion or a referral to a specialist.
- HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) is effective for many women — it is worth asking about.
- Non-hormonal options are also available if HRT is not right for you.
- Menopause should be part of the NHS Health Check for people aged 40 to 74, though this isn't yet routine in every Redbridge practice. You can still raise it at any appointment.

## **Local menopause support — Menopause Reclaimed**

### **Havering Menopause Support Group**

Although based in Havering, this service welcomes women from other boroughs. It is run by Live Well Havering and menopause nurse Rebecca Hall. The group meets online on the first Thursday of every month and is open to everyone. Book a free place on Eventbrite — search for "Menopause Reclaimed".

North East London Women's Health Hubs also offer menopause support. The Barking, Havering and Redbridge hub runs consultant-led menopause clinics — ask your GP for a referral.

Things that might help: keep a symptom diary before your appointment, ask to see a GP with an interest in women's health, and check whether your employer has a menopause policy.



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