

A Cancer Journey



A Cancer Story for Remote Indigenous Patients in the Northern Territory

www.health.nt.gov.au/cancer_services

**healthy
Territory**
fresh ideas | real results

“A Cancer Journey” has been developed to assist health professionals tell the story of cancer to Indigenous people from remote areas of the Northern Territory. The DVD aims to inform patients and their families on what to expect along the path of a cancer journey. There is also a flipchart that accompanies the DVD.

Topics of the DVD cover:

- **What is Cancer**
- **Prevention**
- **Early Detection**
- **Signs & Symptoms**
- **Lung Cancer**
- **Bowel Cancer**
- **Diagnosis**
- **Going to Hospital**
- **Treatment**
- **Side Effects**
- **Palliative Care**
- **After Care**
- **Women’s Business (separate section on breast cancer)**

Acknowledgements

“A Cancer Journey” is a project of the NT Government Department of Health and Families CanNET site.

CanNET aims to improve access to quality cancer services, particularly for people who have poorer cancer outcomes such as those living in rural and regional areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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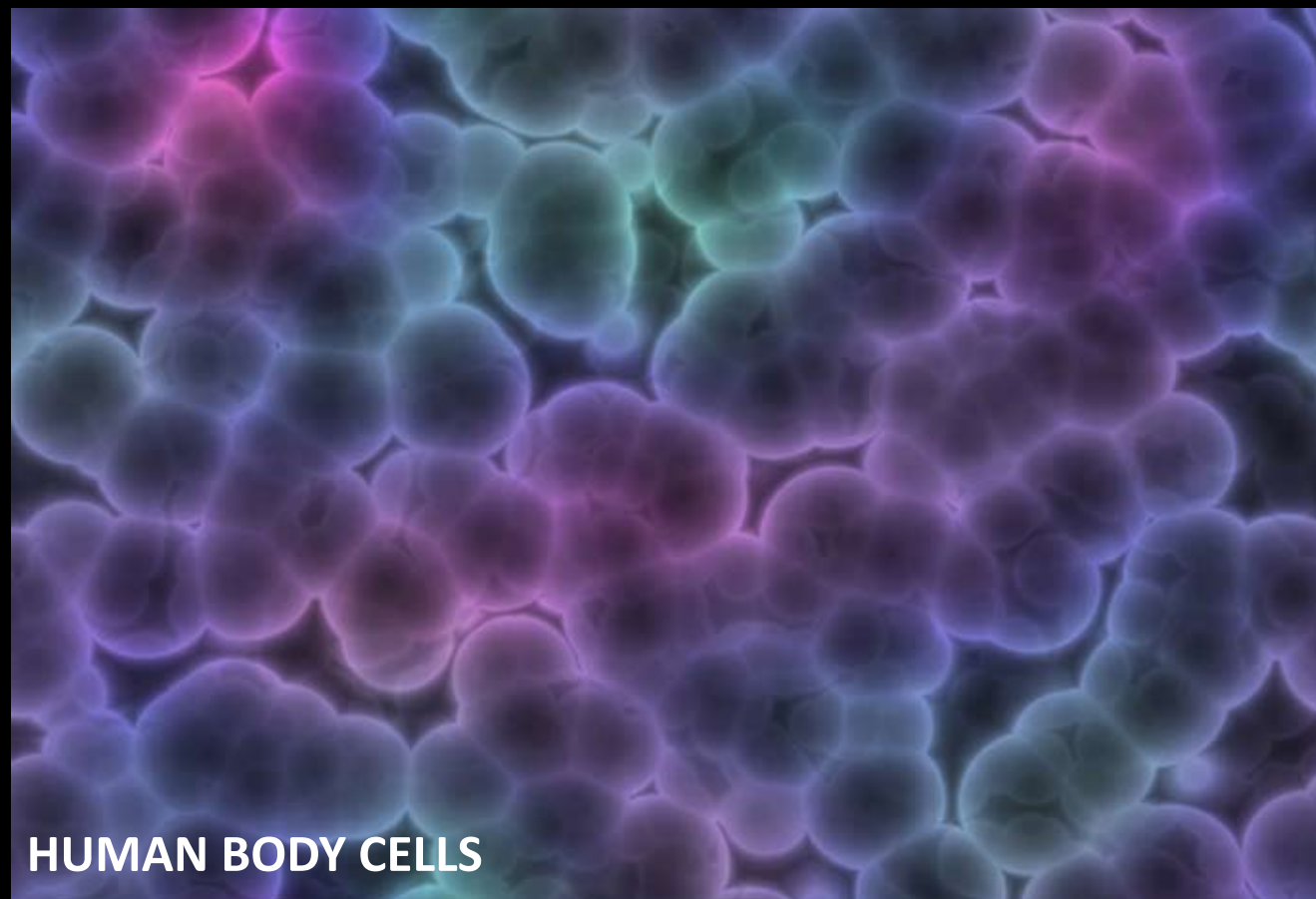
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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this flip chart may contain images of deceased persons.

What are Cells?

- Our bodies have many tiny cells, and keep making new cells to keep us healthy
- When cells in the body get old, or worn out, they die and are replaced by new cells
- This is normal and keeps our body healthy and strong

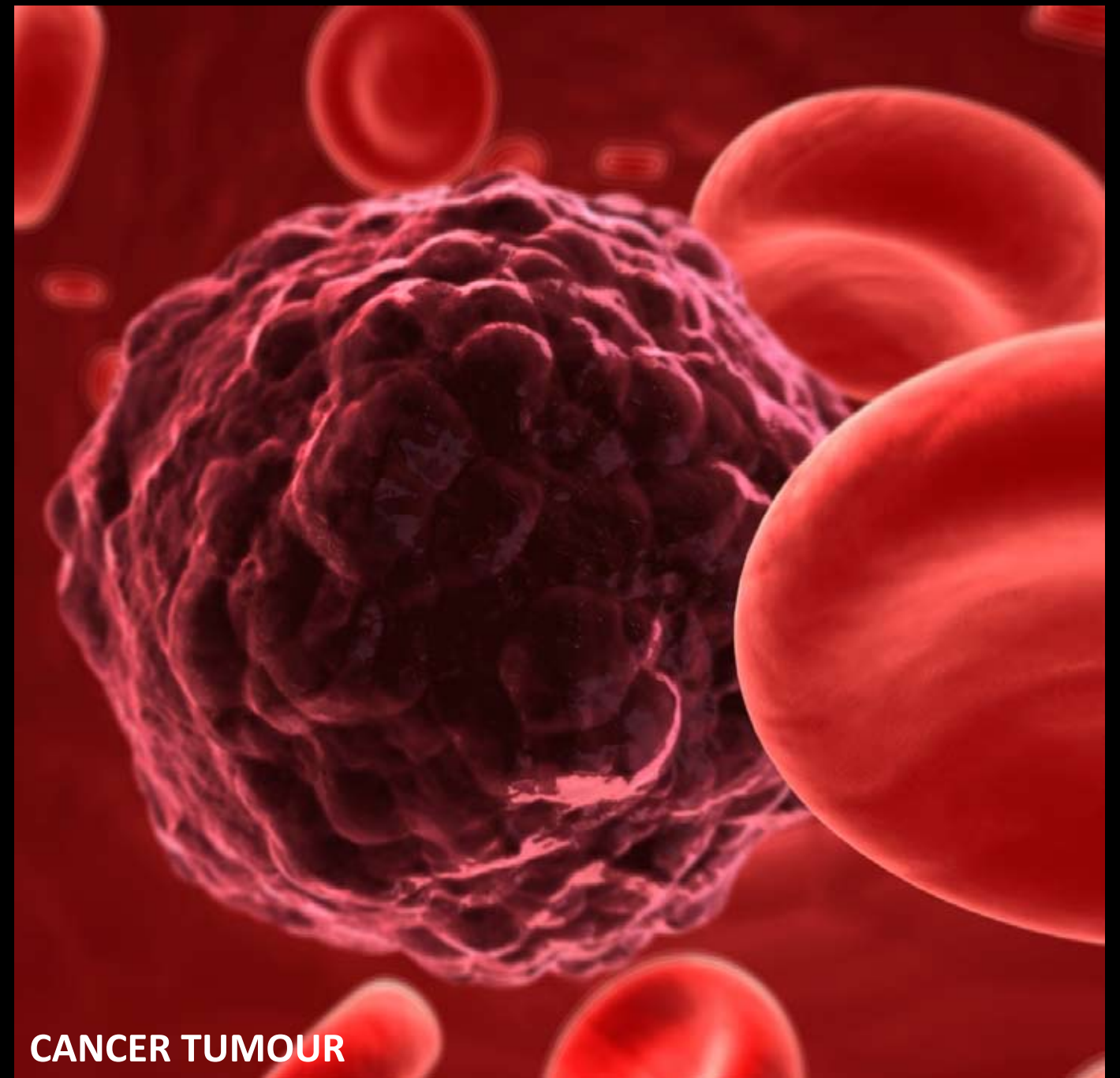
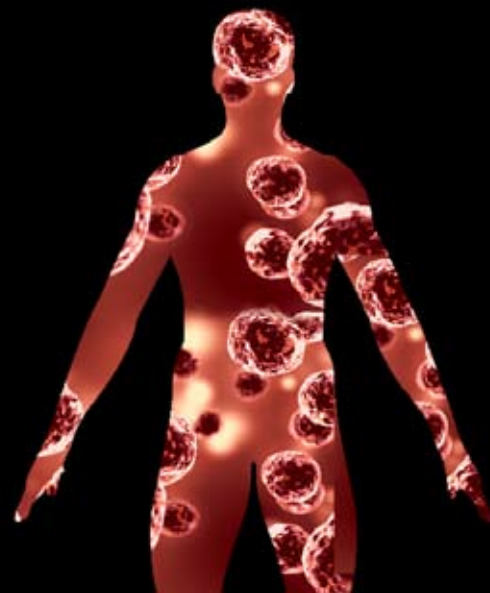


What is Cancer?

- Cancer happens when the body makes too many cells that it does not need
- Cancer cells are different to normal cells and can make the body sick
- There are more than 100 different types of cancers
- Most cancers are named after the body part they start to grow in - for example, cancer that begins in the lung is called lung cancer
- Cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body

How Does Cancer Grow?

- Cancer cells grow faster than normal cells
- A lump of cancer cells is called a tumour
- Cancer can travel through the body and begin to grow in other parts of the body. This is how cancer spreads
- Cancer in different parts of the body affect the body differently
- Each type of cancer has a different cause and a different treatment



CANCER TUMOUR

Prevention

- Doctors do not always know why someone gets cancer
- Cancer is not contagious; you cannot catch it from somebody else

How to reduce your chances of having cancer:

1. Eat healthy food – fruit and vegetables, bush tucker
2. Don't smoke or breathe in other people's cigarette smoke
3. Don't drink alcohol/grog
4. Exercise most days
5. Keep a healthy body weight
6. Visit your health clinic if you are worried about any changes with your body

Your chance of having cancer increases:

1. As you grow older
2. If somebody else in your family has had cancer



Finding Cancer Early

- If cancer is found before it spreads to other areas of the body, there is a better chance that the person can have treatment and get better
- You should visit your health clinic every year for a health check or a Well Women's check to help find cancer early

Know what your body usually feels like and go to the health clinic if you notice any of these changes:

1. Not feeling hungry and losing weight for no reason
2. Being tired with no energy all the time
3. Feeling pain, swelling or itching for no reason
4. Lumps, sores or ulcers that don't get better
5. A cough that won't go away
6. Change in the way you go to the toilet
7. Changes in your body that you are worried about

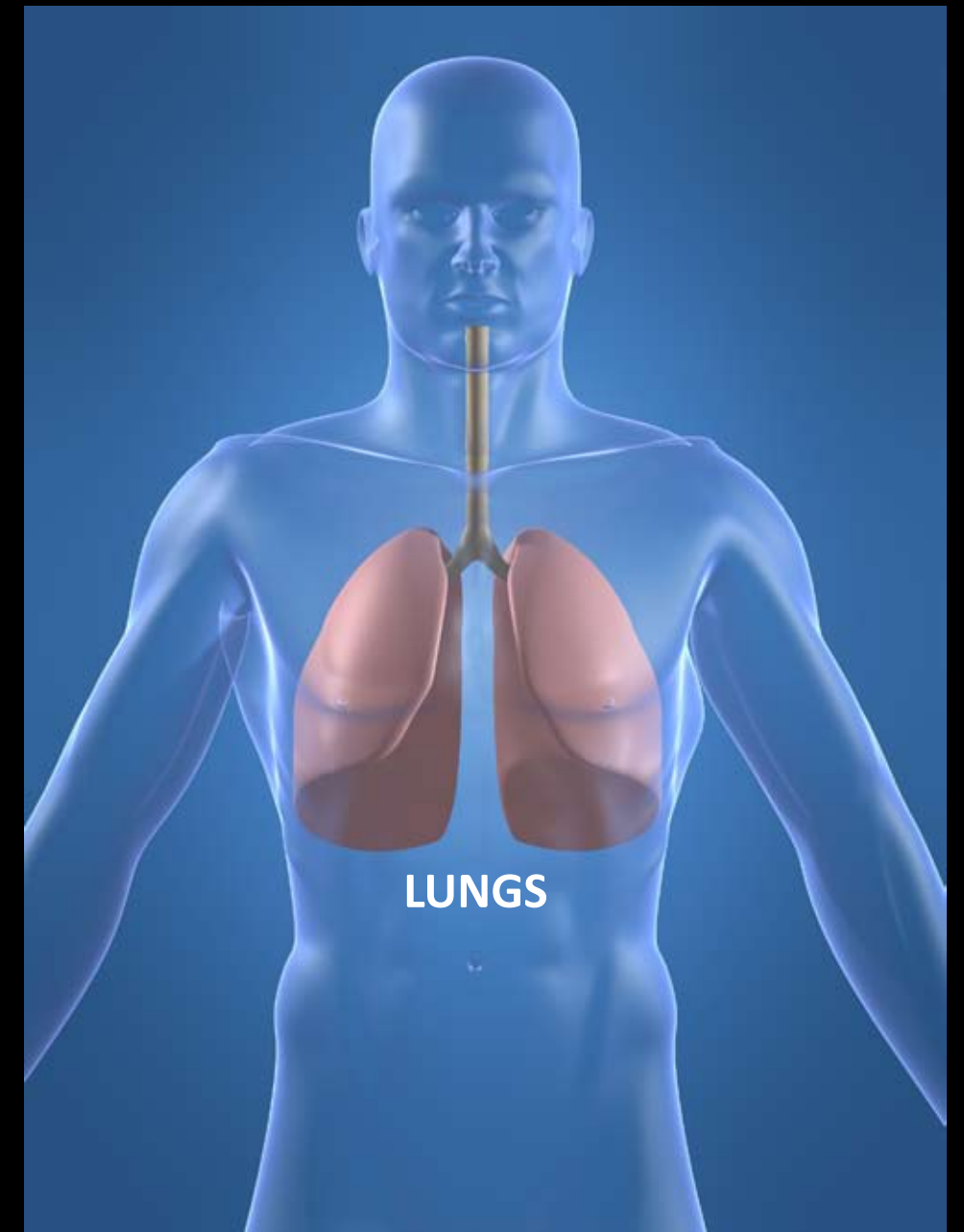


Lung Cancer

- People who smoke, or who breathe in other people's cigarette smoke have a higher chance of getting lung cancer
- People who stop smoking lower their chance of having lung cancer

Go to the doctor or health clinic if you notice these changes:

1. A cough that won't go away, or sounds different
2. Coughing blood
3. Chest infections that keep coming back
4. Feeling short of breath, or wheezing
5. Feeling very tired all the time
6. Weight loss for no reason



Bowel Cancer



- The bowel is a long tube where food travels through your body and where waste products are passed out of the body when you go to the toilet
- You should see your doctor or health clinic if you notice any of the following changes for more than two weeks:
 1. Changes when going to the toilet such as straining (constipation) or loose motions (diarrhoea)
 2. Any blood when going to the toilet
 3. Stomach pain
 4. Not feeling hungry and losing weight for no reason
 5. Feeling very tired, weak or breathless for no reason
- Someone with bowel cancer might not feel any different in the early stages it is growing
- Everyone over the age of 50 should have regular health checks and test for bowel cancer every 2 years. Bowel cancer is easier to treat when found early
- Ask your health clinic about testing for bowel cancer

How do I know if I have cancer?

- There are many different tests to help the doctor find if there is cancer in the body

Cancer is found by:

- Different machines are used to make pictures of the inside of the body to find where the cancer is. Some types of machines that produce pictures are called:
 - X-rays
 - MRI scan (Magnetic Resonance Imaging)
 - CT scan (Computer Tomography)
 - Mammogram - used to photograph the breast
- Sputum test - mucus and saliva from the mouth is tested for cancer cells
- Biopsies - the doctor removes some cells from a lump or swelling of the body to test for cancer
- Blood test - blood is taken from the arm to test for cancer
- Ask your doctor how long it will take to get your results. The results will help your doctor to decide on the best treatment for your type of cancer



MRI MACHINE



MAMMOGRAM



BLOOD TEST

Support

- It is normal to feel frightened or scared when going to hospital. There are Aboriginal Liaison Officers, Aboriginal Health Workers and interpreters there to help you feel comfortable
- Your doctor will talk about tests and treatments with you. You get to decide on what tests and treatment you have
- If you need to hear it in language or explained again for family, you can ask for an Aboriginal Health Worker or interpreter to talk with you
- Most importantly, it is okay for a patient, family member or friend to ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask
- There are many people available to help you learn how to cope with cancer even after you return to country. Ask your health clinic how to get this help



Going to Hospital

- If you have to travel to Alice Springs, Darwin or Adelaide for cancer tests or treatment, you will need to take these things with you:
 - Photo ID
 - Health Card
 - Medicare card
 - All forms and papers for the doctors
 - Money
 - Shoes and warm clothes
- It is very important that you always ask for an interpreter if you need help to understand
- Ask your doctor how long they think you will have to stay in hospital



Travel and Accommodation

- Your doctor and the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme office will organise travel and accommodation for you
- Talk with your doctor if you would like a family member to go with you to hospital to help and ask questions

Royal Darwin Hospital

When you get to the hospital, talk to an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) at the entrance to find out what to do and where to go.



Alice Springs Hospital

Go to the Emergency Department and show your papers to staff who will tell you what you need to do.



Royal Adelaide Hospital

An Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) will meet you at Adelaide Airport and take you to where you will stay.

Always ask for an interpreter if you need help to understand.



Treatment

- There are different treatments for different types of cancers
- Some cancers only need one type of treatment. Others may need a mix of treatments to kill and stop the growth of cancer cells

Types of treatment include:

Surgery - cancer cells are cut out of the body.

- The patient is given medicine called anaesthetic so that they don't feel pain during surgery

Chemotherapy - uses medication to destroy and reduce the number of cancer cells.

- Medication may be given by mouth, or through a needle that delivers the medication straight into the blood

Radiotherapy - a machine directs invisible beams at the cancer cells to destroy or injure cancer cells.

Hormone Therapy - stops the body making hormones chemicals that cancer cells need to grow.



Treatment Side Effects

- Some treatments can make other things happen to the body, this is called side effects of the treatment
- It is important to finish all treatment even if you feel sick. If you don't finish the treatment you won't get better
- Most side effects can be treated and will disappear once your treatment has finished

Possible side-effects include:

- Feeling very tired
- Not feeling hungry or wanting to eat
- Nausea - feeling sick and vomiting

How long is treatment?

- It is important to ask the doctor to explain what treatment you will need, how long the treatment will last, and how many times you need to go back to hospital. You and your doctor will decide together on a treatment plan that is best for you
- If you choose to have treatment you will spend time in hospital before you can return to country
- If you choose no treatment, you may finish up more quickly

Other possible side effects:

CHEMOTHERAPY

- Diarrhoea or constipation
- Increased risk of catching an infection
- Increased risk of bruising
- Hair loss
- Muscle weakness
- Dry or tired eyes
- Mouth sores or ulcers

RADIOTHERAPY

- Dry, red or itchy skin
- Swelling
- Cough or shortness of breath

End of Life Care

- Some cancer can't be cured or fixed. You might then see the Palliative Care team
- End of life care helps the person with cancer and their family so they can live as comfortably as possible
- Some people who have cancer that can't be cured can live for a long time, some only live for a short time. Everyone is different and has a different journey
- With palliative care, the patient can still spend time with their friends and family. It can be a time to pass on stories and traditions
- The Palliative Care team can help someone to decide where they want to finish up
- Some people choose to stay in the hospital, or in the hospice in Darwin, and some people choose to go back to country. It's the patient's choice



Follow Up: After Cancer Care

- Doctors can never be certain that the cancer will not grow back. Cancer can return
- When you get home it is important to go to the community health clinic and tell them you are back so the clinic can get the information on what type of treatment you had and your results
- You will need to keep going back to the doctor or health clinic for check-ups. Your doctor will tell you how often they want to see you
- If you or your family has any questions or needs help, there are people and organisations who you can talk to or get help from. Ask your health clinic how to get this help



Staying Healthy

- It is important to look after your body to help lower the chances of cancer returning. Some things to do to stay healthy are:
 1. Eat healthy food such as fruit and vegetables, bush tucker
 2. Don't smoke or breathe in other people's cigarette smoke
 3. Don't drink alcohol/grog
 4. Exercise most days
 5. Keep a healthy body weight
 6. Visit your health clinic for your check ups or if you have any questions
- It is important for you to stay healthy and strong for your family and community



Women's Business

How to find breast cancer early

Know your own breasts and be breast aware

- All women should know the normal look and feel of their breasts and report any unusual changes (dimpling, shape change, nipple discharge etc.) to your doctor or health worker

Breast Check

- Your doctor, nurse or health worker may check your breast. They will feel your breast, underarm and collarbone area for lumps or differences in your breasts

Mammogram - is a machine that takes a picture of the inside of the breast

- Women between 50 & 69 years old should have a free mammogram/breast screen every two years
- A mammogram can find cancer even when it is too small to feel and there are no symptoms
- Ask your doctor or health worker about how you can have a mammogram



Breast Cancer

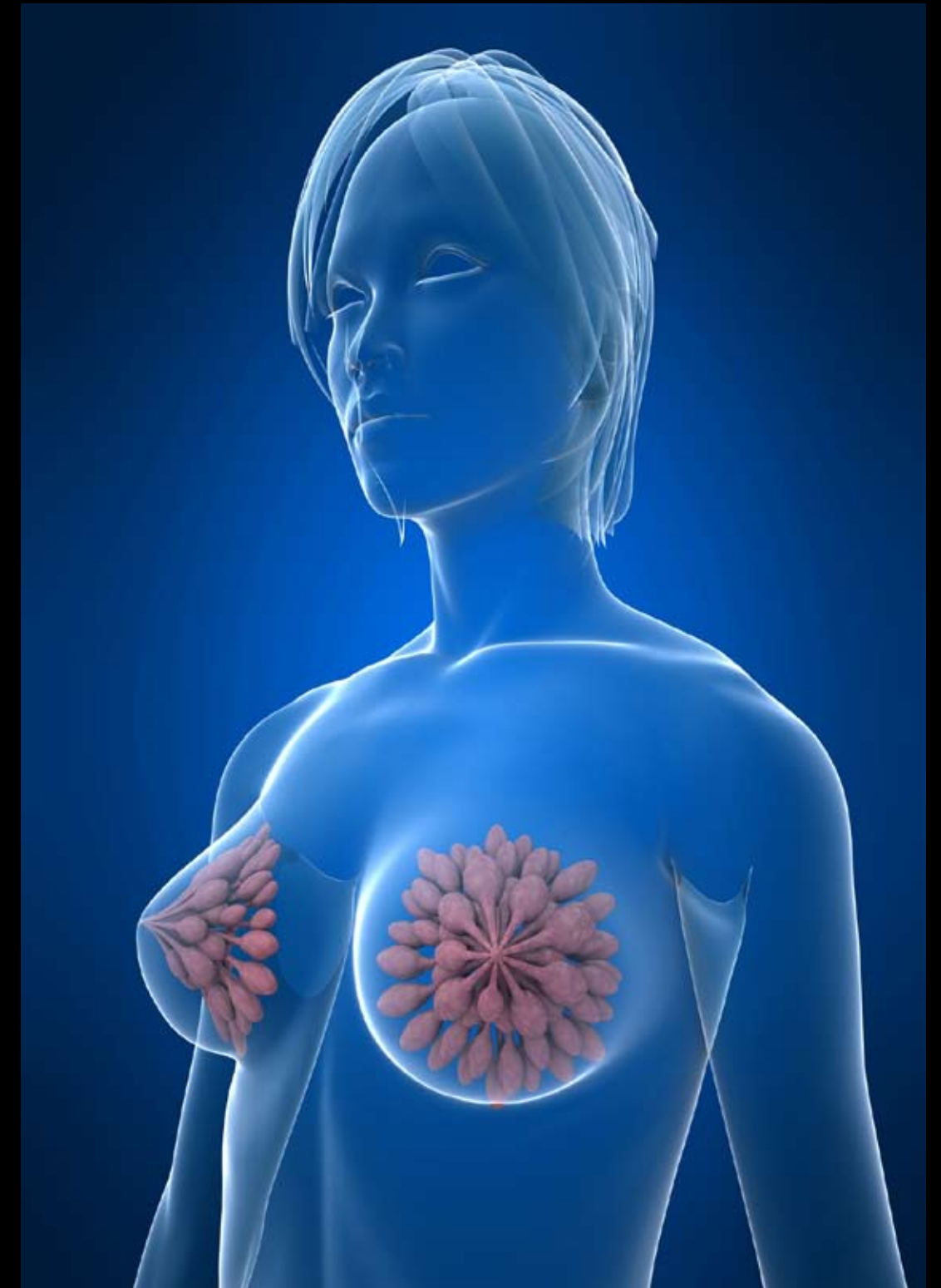
- If found and treated early there is a better chance of survival

Some things that can increase the chance of having breast cancer are:

- Growing older
- If your mother, sister, daughter, father, brother, or son has had breast cancer

Some things that lower your chance of having breast cancer are:

- Keep a healthy body weight
- Exercise most days
- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Don't drink alcohol/grog



Signs of Breast Cancer

Visit the health clinic straight away if you notice:

- A lump, lumpiness or thickening of the breast or underarm area
- Changes in the skin of a breast, such as puckering, dimpling (like the skin of an orange) or a rash
- A change in the shape or size of the breast
- Discharge (ooze) from a nipple, a nipple rash or a change in its shape
- Constant or unusual pain in the breast or nipple
- A nipple turns inward into the breast



Cervical Screening

- All women who have had sex need to have a Pap smear every two years
- A Pap smear can find early cell changes before they become cancer in the cervix of a woman
- Early warning signs that are found in a Pap smear are easy to treat
- You should not feel embarrassed about having a Pap smear
- You can talk to the staff in your health clinic if you feel scared

Using condoms can help reduce the risk of the virus that causes cervical cancer

Signs of Cervical Cancer

- Someone with cervical cancer may not feel any different in the early stages it is growing

Visit your doctor or health clinic if you notice any of these changes:

- Vaginal bleeding between women's bleeding
- Bleeding after change of life (menopause)
- Bleeding or pain after sex
- Unusual discharge from vagina
- Feeling very tired
- Lower back pain
- Abdominal pain or feeling full

