

What to expect when visiting the Cambridge breast unit

Your referral

You will be notified of your appointment by letter or telephone call and given details of the date, place and time. We will endeavour to tell you as soon as possible, and you should be notified of your appointment time within two weeks of your GP referring you.

The clinic

You will then be seen by a member of the Specialist Breast Care Team. The team includes surgeons, radiologists, geneticists, radiographers and breast care nurses.



Meet the team

Before attending the unit

We suggest that you do not wear any deodorant except the clear 'roll-on' variety. Please allow approximately two hours for your visit, and do bring a relative or friend if you wish.

At the unit

You will receive a friendly greeting by experienced staff, who deal mainly with breast conditions. Your usual registration details will need to be checked on arrival.

During your visit you will require a clinical examination.

Whatever procedure is recommended, it will be explained in detail beforehand. Depending on the nature of your problems, you might require one or more of the following investigations (these might be performed on the same day, or a future appointment will be arranged):

Mammogram

This is a (low-dose) X-ray examination of the breast, which involves compression of the whole breast between two plates and lasts for only a few seconds. Some patients find this a little uncomfortable but acceptable.

Ultrasound

This is similar to the ultrasound used for pregnant women. It is a painless examination of the breast using sound waves instead of X-rays. The examination is performed while you are lying down; some jelly is applied to the skin and a probe is passed over the breast to produce a picture on the screen.

Needle or core biopsy

This involves injecting local anaesthetic into the breast, and the introduction of a special

needle designed to take a small sample of tissue for analysis by the pathologist. This procedure can be performed by a surgeon or radiologist. According to the method used, this can take 10–30 minutes.

The majority of our breast biopsies are performed using ultrasound for guidance. Occasionally patients will need a breast biopsies using mammographic guidance.

Breast MRI

Very occasionally patients will need a Magnetic Resonance Scan of their breasts. This will be performed in another part of the hospital at another appointment.

Results from the tests

It is our policy to explain the results of the examinations as we perform them, so you will be kept informed throughout your visit. Should it be necessary to perform a needle/core biopsy, it will take a week for the pathologist to process the test. For this reason, we will need you to return the following week for the result. At this time, the details of the result will be fully discussed with you. Your GP will also be fully informed of the result and any recommended treatment.