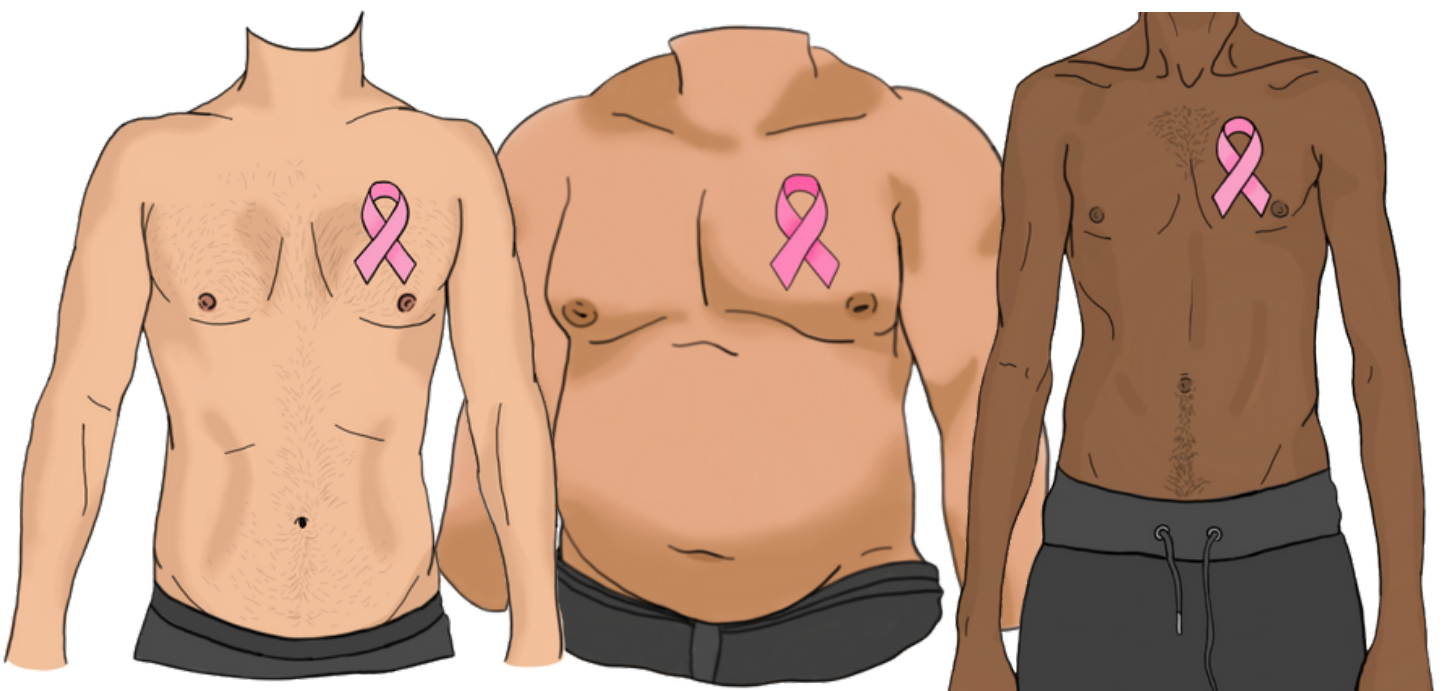


## Visiting the doctor - Introduction

Finding the courage and determination to visit your doctor to talk about a problem that you're facing is difficult. However, it's incredibly important not to put off going to see a medical professional when you need to. In serious cases, it can be the difference between sorting out a problem before it becomes really dangerous and delaying it so long that nothing can be done. Medical appointments are stressful for most people, but particularly for autistic people. Doctors' offices and clinics are often not designed with the comfort of autistic people in mind.

About 56,000 people in the UK are diagnosed with breast cancer every year, and 15% of all newly diagnosed cancers are breast cancers. 1 in 7 women develop breast cancer during their lifetimes. [But men can also get breast cancer](#), so it's important that everyone checks themselves. Research also suggests that transgender women undergoing hormone treatment face greater risk than cisgender men. Breast cancer is something we all have to be aware of. What follows is a story about visiting two medical professionals for a breast cancer appointment.

This will give you some idea about what might happen and what you might need to do.



## Visiting the Doctor

Today, you have to visit the doctor. You made this appointment after experiencing some concerning symptoms in the breast area. These included a change in skin texture, nipple discharge, pain in your armpit, and a rash around the nipple. These are concerning symptoms, so it's really important to check with your doctor. Although going to the doctors is a stressful experience, you know you must not put it off.

The waiting room isn't a comforting environment for an autistic person. There are people you don't know all around you, and it's quite noisy. But this isn't an appointment you can afford to miss. Your doctor invites you into the office. It's difficult to explain your problem clearly, and you worry that you might not give them all the information you need. It can be helpful in situations like this to write out everything you are worried about and hand it to your doctor. Your doctor examines you and confirms that you need to attend the breast clinic. They make a referral and you get an appointment within the next few weeks.

## Visiting the Breast Clinic

You know that it's incredibly important to attend your appointment at the breast clinic and not to miss the booked time. The earlier the cancer is found, the better the chances are that treatment will be successful.

You're here to see a specialist who has the knowledge and experience to check you for breast cancer. The specialist medical practitioner asks you if you have ever had any other problems in the breast area, and also checks if anyone else in your family has a history of this type of cancer. You are then examined. The practitioner checks the breast area, and also the lymph nodes that are in your armpits and around your neck.

You also have to undergo some tests. The medical practitioner tells you about the different sorts of tests you might have to have. It's often unpleasant to be examined or have tests, but it's the only way to be sure. The tests include breast ultrasounds, where a gel is spread onto your body and you are checked with a small device which is pressed against your skin. You might also have a mammogram, which is a low-dose x-ray of the chest, or a biopsy, which involves the surgical removal of a small piece of tissue, which is checked for cancer.

You get some of your test results on the day, but you might have to wait to get them all back. These results will let you know if you have breast cancer. Remember that most people who find potential signs of breast cancer will not actually have it, but it's still important to get checked out so you can get the right treatment.

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