

Text message reminders boost breast cancer screening attendance

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Women who received a text message reminding them about their breast cancer screening appointment were 20 per cent more likely to attend than those who were not texted, according to a study published in the *British Journal of Cancer* today (Thursday).

Researchers, funded by the Imperial College Healthcare Charity, trialled text message reminders for women aged 47-53 years old who were invited for their first appointment for [breast cancer screening](#).

The team compared around 450 women who were sent a text with 435 women who were not texted. It found that 72 per cent of women who were sent a text message reminder attended their [screening](#) appointment, compared with 60 per cent who were not.

Text message reminders had the biggest impact on women from the most deprived areas who were 28 per cent more likely to attend their first screening appointment if they were sent a text.

The research found that women were almost three times more likely to cancel their appointment in advance if they were sent a text message reminder.

Lead author, Robert Kerrison, at the Cancer Research UK health behaviour unit at UCL, said: "We all forget things now and then, and doctor's appointments are no exception – in fact, forgetting is one of the most commonly cited reasons why women miss [breast cancer](#) screening

appointments.

"Our research found that a cheap, simple text-message-reminder could boost the number of women – especially those from deprived areas – attending screening, or cancelling in advance. More trials are needed to confirm this, but texting could save valuable NHS resources."

Ian Lush, chief executive of Imperial College Healthcare Charity, said: "The potential positive impact the study could have on the UK population's health is huge and goes far beyond the borders of London where the [text message](#) service was originally trialled. Research outcomes like this confirm the need for the charity to continue funding such pioneering work which will continue to help improve the health of the population."

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK's head of health information, said: "Research like this can help tackle practical barriers that sometimes stop [women](#) from attending screening appointments. Cancer screening can save lives, but it's important to remember there are risks as well as benefits. People should also receive good quality information to help them decide whether to take up a screening invitation."

More information: "Text-message reminders increase uptake of routine breast screening appointments: A Randomised Controlled Trial in a hard-to-reach population." *British Journal of Cancer*. DOI: 10.1038/bjc.2015.36

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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