

Women with disabilities may be missing out on cancer screening

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Women with disabilities are a third less likely to participate in breast cancer screening and a quarter less likely to take part in bowel cancer screening compared to women reporting no disabilities, according to a new paper published in the *British Journal of Cancer* by researchers from the University of Oxford.

More than a fifth of the nearly 500,000 women who were offered breast or bowel cancer [screening](#) reported some disability; difficulties with mobility were the most commonly reported. Women with two or more [disabilities](#) were less likely to take part in screening compared to women who had one disability, according to the Million Women Study partly funded by Cancer Research UK.

Women with disabilities that affected eyesight, mobility and the ability to take care of themselves were the least likely to take part in [cancer](#) screening. Women who reported any disability and also did not have access to a car were more likely to miss breast screenings.

Dr Sarah Floud, lead researcher based at the University of Oxford, said: "While taking part in screening is a personal choice, our research suggests that women with disabilities may not have equal access to screening programmes. This is despite the fact that all people of the relevant age groups are routinely invited for free [cancer screening](#), and that the screening programmes offer special arrangements for people with disabilities."

Women were considered to have a disability if they reported difficulty walking up a flight of stairs and said their walking pace was slow or if they reported their hearing, eyesight or memory to be poor. Disabilities also included difficulty bathing or dressing.

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK's head of health and patient information, said: "This research highlights the various practical barriers that can prevent [women](#) with disabilities from taking part in screening. Having a better understanding of their specific needs means that the design of screening programmes can be improved to ensure people with disabilities can take up invitations to screening if they choose."

More information: Floud et al. Disability and participation in breast and bowel cancer screening in England: a large prospective study. *British Journal of cancer*, www.nature.com/bjc/journal/vaol/ull/bjc2017331a.html

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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