What is ductal carcinoma in situ?
Ductal carcinoma in situ, or DCIS, is the name for a condition in which abnormal cells are within the milk ducts of the breast. These abnormal cells do not generally spread to the rest of the body. Therefore, DCIS is not considered to be an invasive breast cancer. However, if left untreated, DCIS has the potential to turn into an invasive breast cancer. DCIS usually does not cause a lump, so it cannot be detected during a clinical breast exam, although mammography is able to detect about 80% of DCIS cases.

Does DCIS increase the risk of breast cancer?
According to the joint study findings1 released in March 2010 by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, Australian women diagnosed with DCIS were about four times more likely to develop a subsequent invasive breast cancer than other Australian women of similar age. However, the probability of progression from DCIS to breast cancer would vary with characteristics of the DCIS, including its size, grade and whether or not necrosis (premature death of cells or living tissues) is present. It is important to treat DCIS to reduce the risk of invasive breast cancer developing.

How common is DCIS in Australia?
More than 1,500 women are diagnosed with DCIS annually in Australia. In 2007, there were 380 cases of DCIS recorded in Queensland and 62 of these were aged between 50 and 69 years. Not every woman with DCIS develops an invasive breast cancer and, similarly, those diagnosed with an invasive breast cancer are not necessarily those with a DCIS. The diagnosis of DCIS has become more frequent since the introduction of mammography and progressive breast screening in Australia in 1988. Not all DCIS incidences are recorded with cancer registries.

What are the symptoms of DCIS?
In most cases, there is no breast lump or other breast changes. DCIS is usually found by routine screening with a mammogram. Over the past three decades, improvements in mammography have made early detection of a larger number of tissue abnormalities, including DCIS, possible. Most women with DCIS are not aware of any symptoms at the time of diagnosis.

Where can I get more information about DCIS?