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BREAST SELF-EXAM

A **breast self-exam** is done to detect changes that could lead to breast cancer. To learn what is normal for your breasts and to find any problems, you should do a **breast self-exam** once a month. It is one of the best things you can do for your health. Finding and treating breast cancer early can save your life.

Why Do Breast Self-Exams?

If breast cancer is found early, most women can be treated with success. That is why routine **breast self-exams**, mammography, and checkups by your doctor are vital (see box).

By doing a monthly **breast self-exam**, you learn how your breasts feel. This helps you detect any changes or signs of a problem.

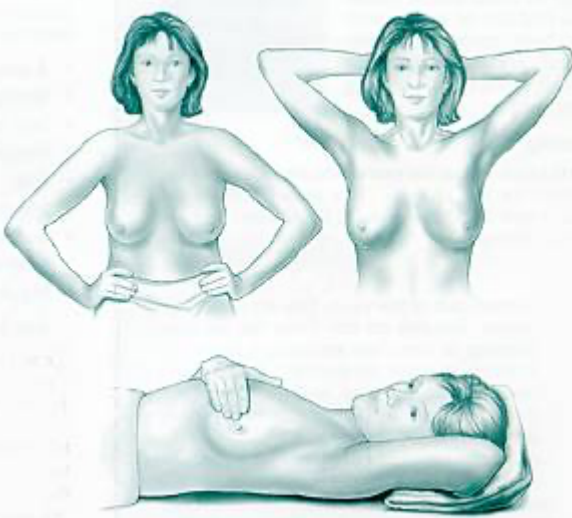
By doing routine **breast self-exams** and having routine mammograms and checkups, you can help detect breast problems early.

How to Do a Breast Self-Exam

The best time to do the **breast self-exam** is a few days after your period ends each month. It's easier at this time because your breasts are less tender or swollen. If you are not having periods, try to do the exam on the same day each month. Some women choose the first day of each month to help them remember. There are two parts to a **breast self-exam**-looking and feeling.

When Should I Have Screening Tests?

Test	How Often
Mammography	Once a year for women age 40 years and older Once a year for a woman who has a first-degree relative (mother, sister, or daughter) or more than one other relative with breast or ovarian cancer that occurred before menopause, sometimes starting before age 40
Doctor's exam of breasts	Once or twice a year
Breast self-exams	Once a month



Breast Self Exam

Looking

The self-exam should always be done in good light. Stand or sit in front of a mirror. Place arms at your sides. Look for dimpling, puckering, or redness of the breast skin, discharge from the nipples, or changes in breast size or shape. Look for the same signs with your hands pressed tightly on your hips and then with your arms raised high.

Feeling

Lie flat on your back. Place a folded towel or a pillow under your left shoulder. Place your left hand under or over your head. You also can feel for changes when you are standing.

With your right hand, keeping the fingers flat and together, gently feel your left breast without pressing too hard. Use one of the three methods shown here. Then lower your right arm and do the exam on the other breast.

Choose one of these methods



Circle. Begin at the top of your breast and move your fingers slowly around the outside in a large circle. When you return to the top, move your hand a little closer to the nipple and make a smaller circle. Do this in smaller and smaller circles until you have examined all of the breast tissue.

Lines. Begin in the underarm area. Slowly move your fingers down until they are below your breast. Move your fingers closer toward your nipple and go slowly back up, using the same motion. Use this up-and-down pattern all the way across your breast.

Wedge. Begin at the outside edge of your breast. Slowly work your way in toward the nipple, doing one wedge-shaped section at a time. Do this until the entire breast area has been examined.

Don't Forget

- With any pattern, be sure to examine the nipples also. Gently squeeze the nipple and check for any discharge.
- Examine the upper chest area and below the armpits-these places also have breast tissue.
- Call your doctor if you notice any lumps or changes in your breasts.

Remember how your breasts feel each month. Mark any lumps or other changes on the diagram shown here. Show it to your doctor.

Signs of a Problem

If you notice any of these symptoms during your **breast self-exam**, call your doctor:

- A lump
- Swelling
- Skin irritation
- Dimpling
- Pain
- Nipple retraction (nipple turns in)
- Redness of nipple or breast skin
- Scaly nipple or breast skin
- Nipple discharge



Any lump should be checked right away. Tests may be needed, such as an ultrasound or MRI. In some cases, a biopsy may be done to look at the tissue.

Finally...

Do the **breast self-exam** once a month. If you detect any signs of a problem, call and come in for a visit as soon as possible. By doing routine **breast self-exams** and having routine mammograms and checkups, you can help detect breast problems early - when they most likely can be treated with success.

Just as important as doing self-exams, is to be 'aware' of your breasts. If you notice a difference or they do not feel 'right' come in and get a checkup. Don't hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.