



Education

Breast Self-Exam

What is a breast self-exam?

A breast self-exam is a monthly exam a woman can do herself to check for breast cancer. When you do a breast self-exam you check for lumps, thickening, and dimples in the breast. You also check for lumps in your underarms and discharge from the nipple.

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in American women. When breast cancer is found early and treated right away, the chances for cure are much better. Every woman should do regular breast self-exams.

What is the best time to examine my breasts?

Examine your breasts once a month at the end of your period, when your breasts usually are not tender or swollen. If you have already been through menopause or have had a hysterectomy, check your breasts on the first day of every month or whenever you can best remember to do it monthly.

How do I do a breast self-exam?

1. Lie down and put your left arm under your head. This spreads the breast tissue more evenly on your chest. Use your right hand to examine your left breast. With your 3 middle fingers flat, move gently in a small circular motion over the entire area of the breast, checking for any lump, hard knot, or thickening. Use different levels of pressure--light, medium, and firm--to feel breast tissue at different levels in your breast. Then put your right arm under your head. Use your left hand to examine your right breast in the same way you checked your left breast. Be sure to check the whole breast, from your collar bone above your breast and down until you feel only ribs below your breast.
2. Look at your breasts while standing in front of a mirror with your hands pressing firmly down on your hips. Look for lumps, new differences in size and shape, and swelling or dimpling of the skin.
3. While standing or sitting, slightly raise one arm, then the other, so you can check your underarm area for lumps.
4. Squeeze the nipple of each breast gently between your thumb and index finger. Report any discharge or fluid to your health care provider right away.

If you want to check to see if you are doing the exam the right way, ask your health care provider to show you how to do it.

When should I call the health care provider?


Contact your provider as soon as possible if a change occurs, such as:

- development of a lump or swelling
- skin irritation or dimpling
- nipple pain or retraction (nipple turning inward)
- redness or scaly rash on the nipple or breast skin
- a discharge (other than breast milk in nursing mothers).

Fortunately, most lumps and other changes are not cancerous, but only your provider can make the diagnosis.


Reserved. Developed by Phyllis G. Cooper, RN, MN, and McKesson Provider Technologies. This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

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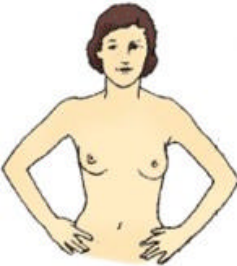
Step 1

Lie down and put your left arm under your head. Use your right hand to examine your left breast. With your 3 middle fingers flat, move in a circular motion over the breast, checking for any lump, hard knot, or thickening. Use different levels of pressure to feel breast tissue at different levels in your breast. Next, put your right arm under your head and examine your right breast with your left hand in the same way. Be sure to check the whole breast, from your collar bone above your breast and down until you feel only ribs below your breast.




Step 2


Look at your breasts while standing in front of a mirror with your hands on your hips. Look for lumps, new differences in size and shape, and swelling or dimpling of the skin.



Step 3

Raise one arm, then the other, so you can check under your arms for lumps.





Step 4

Squeeze the nipple of each breast gently between your thumb and index finger. Report any discharge or fluid to your health care provider right away.

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