

SelfBreastExam

Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among women. The best time to find breast cancer is early, when it's most treatable.

The cause of breast cancer is not known, but there are some things you can do to detect problems early.

- ▶ Get regular mammograms after 40
- ▶ See your doctor for regular breast exams
- ▶ Practice monthly self-breast exams

It is important to get an idea of what your breasts feel like normally as this will enable you to be more aware of changes if they develop. You are the best authority on your own breasts. Doing self-breast exam every month helps you become that authority.

If you are still menstruating, it is best to wait at least two to three days after your period ends to do the self-breast exam when your breasts are less likely to be swollen and tender.

How to Do a Self Breast Exam

There are three equally effective methods that can be used. It is important to choose the method that is most comfortable and to use the same method each month.

Circular method

- ▶ Use the hand opposite the breast, beginning at the outermost top of the breast.
- ▶ Press the flat portions of the second, third and fourth fingertips into the breast.
- ▶ Move in small circles slowly, working toward the nipple.
- ▶ Press gently to feel tissues under the skin and more firmly to feel deep tissues.
- ▶ Cover all areas of the breast.
- ▶ Repeat for the opposite breast.

"Wheel Spokes" Method

- ▶ Imagine the breast is divided into sections, like spokes dividing a wheel.
- ▶ Begin at the outermost top of the breast.
- ▶ Press the flat portions of the fingertips into the breast, moving first toward the nipple, then away from the nipple.
- ▶ When the section is complete, slide fingers slightly to the next area and repeat, gradually moving around your entire breast.
- ▶ Repeat for the opposite breast.

Grid Method

- ▶ Begin at the innermost portion of the breast, near the breastbone.
- ▶ With the flat portions of the fingertips, move down the breast, pressing firmly and gently.
- ▶ Slide fingers up the breast, then down until the entire breast area has been examined.
- ▶ Repeat for the opposite breast.

See a health care provider if: a lump or change in the breast is found; the skin's texture or color changes or dimples; the nipple discharges fluid or blood; or the nipple "pulls in".

Eighty percent of all lumps found are normal breast tissue. However, if you notice a change in your breast tissue, don't wait. See your health care provider immediately.

This information is general. If your doctor tells you something different, follow his or her instructions.
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For more information about women's health issues, stop by our Resource Center at 2000 West First Street, Piedmont Plaza II, 1st Floor, Winston Salem, NC 27104, visit our website at <http://www.wakehealth.edu/WHCOE/> or contact us at (336) 713-4220.

The Five Steps of a Self-Breast Exam

Step 1: Visual Inspection

Stand in front of a mirror with your upper body unclothed and put both hands behind your head.

Here is what you should look for:

- Look for changes in the shape, size and color of your breasts.
- Check for dimples, puckering or bulging of the skin or “pulling in” of the nipples.
- Check for scaling, redness, tenderness, swelling or rash on your breasts and nipples.
- Check that breasts are evenly shaped without visible distortion or swelling.

If you see any of the changes listed above, bring them to your doctor’s attention.

Step 2: Visual Inspection Continued

Now, raise your arms and look for the same changes, described in Step 1.

Next, place your hands on your hips, press firmly inward and tighten your chest muscles. While doing this look at your breasts for any changes in their usual appearance. Perform previous step again while leaning slightly forward.

Step 3: Visual Inspection Continued

While you are at the mirror, gently squeeze each nipple between your finger and thumb, checking for nipple discharge. This could be a milky or yellow fluid or blood.

Step 4: Lying Down

Masses in the lower part of the breast may be more easily felt lying down.

- To examine your left breast, lie flat on your back with a pillow or folded towel under your left shoulder.
- Raise your left arm over your head.
- Use the flat portions of the second, third and fourth fingertips of your right hand to examine your left breast with one of the methods described on the previous page.
- Press gently to feel tissue under the skin and then more firmly for deep tissue.
- Repeat for the right breast.

Be sure to feel all the breast tissue, just beneath your skin with a soft touch and down deeper with a firmer touch. Begin examining each area softly then increase pressure so that you can feel the deeper tissue, down to your ribcage.

Step 5: In the shower

Finally, feel your breasts while you are standing or sitting. Many women find that the easiest way to feel their breasts is when their skin is wet and slippery, so they like to do this step in the shower. Cover the entire breast, using the same hand movements described in Step 4.

Additional Areas to Check

Check the area between the upper breast and your armpit, as well as the armpit itself. Be sure to check the area just above your collarbones for enlarged lymph nodes, also.

