

BREAST SELF-EXAM (BSE)

Breast self-exam is one of the best early cancer detection methods. By practicing breast self-exam, you will get used to the normal feel of your breasts and thus detect any abnormal changes. Seek medical attention immediately if you should discover a lump or find any changes.

When to examine your breasts

- A week from the first day of your period when your breasts are least tender.
- On the same day of each month if you no longer menstruate
- Breast-feeding mothers should examine their breasts when all the milk has been expressed.

How to examine your breasts

I. Position

Stand in front of a mirror in each of these positions and look for changes in:

1. the size and shape of the breasts, like dimpling, puckering, or swellings.
2. color and texture of the skin and nipple
3. evidence of discharge from the nipples
 - Arms raised above head
 - Arms relaxed at side
 - Hands on hips
 - Bending forward

II. Perimeter

The exam area is bounded by the line which extends down from the middle of the armpit to just beneath the breast, continues across the underside of the breast to the middle of the breast bone then moves up and along the collar bone and back to the middle of the armpit. Most breast cancers occur in the upper outer area of the breast (shaded area).

1. Flat Position: Lie flat on your back with a pillow or folded towel under the shoulder of the breast to be examined.
2. (For women with large breasts) Side-lying or the "Twist" Position: Lie on the opposite side of the breast to be examined. Rotate the shoulder (on the same side as the breast to be examined) back to the flat surface. Use the side-lying position to examine the outer half of your breast.

III. How To Feel Your Breast Tissue?

- Use the pads of the three middle fingers to feel every inch of your breast tissue for lumps. Move your fingers in small circles and do not lift your fingers from your breast between each area. You can use lotion or powder to help your finger glide from one area to the next.

IV. Pressure

- Feel with various levels of pressure, from light to medium, to firm, to examine the full thickness of your breast tissue. Using pressure will not injure the breast. Use each pressure level to feel the breast tissue before moving on to the next area.

V. Pattern of Search

- Examine your breast in an up and down line. Check the entire breast area and remember how your breasts feel from month to month.
- Feel carefully beneath the nipple.
- Examine the breast tissue that extends into your armpit.
- Women who have had any breast surgery should still examine the entire area and the incision. Examine the incision carefully from end to end.
- Squeeze your nipple to check for discharge.

VI. Practice With Feedback

- Learn how to perform BSE from your doctor, nurse, or health educator. It is important that you perform BSE while your instructor is watching to be sure you are doing it correctly. Practice your skills under supervision until you feel comfortable and confident.

VII. Plan of Action

- **Discuss** the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation breast cancer detection guidelines with your healthcare professional.
- **Schedule** your clinical breast examination and mammogram as appropriate.
- **Perform** BSE. Ask your health professional for feedback on your BSE skills.
- **Report** any changes to your healthcare professional.