

BREAST SELF EXAM

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

Breast Self-Examination (BSE) should be done once a month so you become familiar with the usual appearance and feel of your breasts. Familiarity makes it easier to notice any changes in the breasts from one month to another. Early discovery of change from what is "normal" is the main idea behind BSE.

The best time to do a BSE is two or three days after your period ends, when your breasts are least likely to be tender or swollen. If you no longer menstruate, pick a day, such as the first day of the month, to remind yourself it is time.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Stand before a mirror undressed. Inspect both breasts for anything unusual, such as any discharge from the nipples, puckering, dimpling or scaling of the skin. The next two steps are designed to emphasize any changes in the shape or contour of your breasts. As you do them, you should be able to feel your chest muscles tighten.



2. Watching closely in the mirror, clasp hands behind your head and press hands forward.

3. Next press hands firmly on hips and bow toward your mirror as you pull your shoulders and elbows forward.



Some women prefer to do the next part of the exam in the shower. Some women prefer to do the next part of the exam in the shower. Fingers glide over soapy skin, making it easy to concentrate on the texture underneath.

4. Raise your left arm. Use three or four fingers of your right hand to explore your left breast firmly, carefully, and thoroughly. Beginning at the outer edge, press the flat part of your fingers in small circles, moving the circles slowly around the breast. Gradually work toward the nipple. Be sure to cover the entire breast. Pay special attention to the area between the breast and the arm pit itself. Feel for any unusual lumps or mass under the skin.



5. Some women lying down. If you wish to, lie flat on your back, left arm over your head



and a pillow or folded towel under your left shoulder. This position flattens the breast and makes it easier to examine. Use the same circular motion described earlier. Repeat on your right breast.

You might want to try both positions - standing or lying down, to see which is more comfortable for you. However, the most important choice is the decision to do Breast Self-Examination each month.

Breast cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer among American women. In 2005, approximately 213,000 women in the United States will learn that they have breast cancer. Seventy-seven percent of them will be more than 50 years old, but breast cancer does occur in younger women (and in about 1500 men a year).

No one knows exactly what causes breast cancer. But it is known that breast cancer is most treatable and curable when the tumor is small. Also, treatment may be more limited and less disfiguring if the cancer is found when it is confined to a small area of the breast. For these reasons, researchers have long looked for methods of detecting or finding breast cancer early in its growth before it has had a chance to spread.

HERE ARE THE BEST MEANS OF CHECKING FOR BREAST CANCER:

1. Monthly breast self-examination.
2. A regular physical exam.
3. An initial mammogram screening between 35-40 years of age and then yearly after 40, unless otherwise advised by your physician.
4. Personal alertness for changes in the breast.
5. Prompt discussion of breast changes with your medical provider.

Student Health Center



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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.