

## Breast Awareness and Self-Examination

Women should be aware of how their breasts normally feel and report any changes to their doctor right away. Finding a change does not mean that you have cancer. By being aware of how your own breasts feel, you are likely to notice any changes that take place.

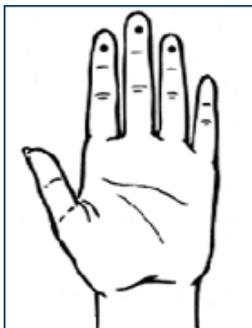
Doing a breast self-exam (BSE) is a way for women (starting in their 20s) to find changes in their breasts. If you decide to do BSE (and it's OK not to do it or to do it occasionally), you should ask your doctor to watch you do it during your regular physical exam.

You should see your doctor right away if you notice any of these changes:

a lump or swelling, skin irritation or dimpling, nipple pain or the nipple turning inward, redness or scaliness of the nipple or breast skin, or a discharge other than breast milk. But remember that most of the time these breast changes are not cancer.

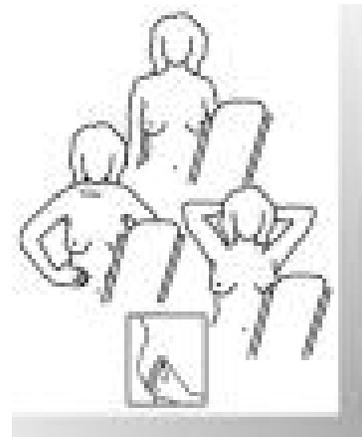
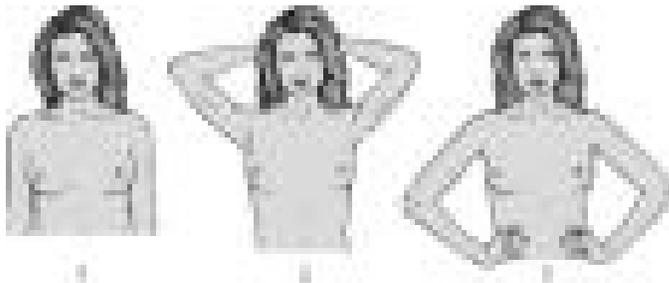
If you choose to do BSE, the following information provides a step-by-step approach for the exam. The best time for a woman to examine her breasts is when the breasts are not tender or swollen. Women who are pregnant, breast-feeding, or have breast implants can also choose to examine their breasts regularly. If you choose not to do BSE, you should still be aware of your breasts and report any changes without delay to your doctor.

### How to Examine Your Breasts



- Lie down and place your right arm behind your head. The exam is done while lying down, not standing up. This is because when lying down the breast tissue spreads evenly over the chest wall and it is as thin as possible making it much easier to feel all the breast tissue.
- Use the finger pads of the 3 middle fingers on your left hand to feel for lumps in the right breast. Use overlapping dime-sized circular motions of the finger pads to feel the breast tissue.

- Use 3 different levels of pressure to feel all the breast tissue. Light pressure is needed to feel the tissue closest to the skin; medium pressure to feel a little deeper; and firm pressure to feel the tissue closest to the chest and ribs. A firm ridge in the lower curve of each breast is normal. If you're not sure how hard to press, talk with your doctor or nurse. Use each pressure level to feel the breast tissue before moving on to the next spot.
- Move around the breast in an up and down pattern starting at an imaginary line drawn straight down your side from the underarm and moving across the breast to the middle of the chest bone.(sternum or breastbone). Be sure to check the entire breast area going down until you feel only ribs and up to the neck or collar bone (clavicle).
- There is some evidence to suggest that the up and down pattern (sometimes called the vertical pattern) is the most effective pattern for covering the entire breast, without missing any breast tissue.
- Repeat the exam on your left breast, using the finger pads of the right hand.



- While standing in front of a mirror with your hands pressing firmly down on your hips, look at your breasts for any changes of size, shape, contour, or dimpling. (The pressing down on the hips position contracts the chest wall muscles and enhances any breast changes.)
- Examine each underarm while sitting up or standing and with your arm only slightly raised so you can easily feel in this area. Raising your arm straight up tightens the tissue in this area and makes it difficult to examine.