

Frequently Asked Questions about Breast Self-Exams

Why should I do a breast self-exam?

Regular breast self-exam can help you know how your breasts normally feel and look, so you can notice any changes. When you find a change, you should see your health care provider. Most breast changes or lumps are not cancerous, but only a health care provider can tell you for sure. When breast cancer is found early, you have more treatment choices and a better chance of recovery. So, it is important to find breast cancer as early as possible.

Breast self-exam should not take the place of getting regular mammograms. Right now, mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early and to improve your chances for survival.

What am I looking for when I do a breast self-exam?

You are looking for a lump or change that stands out as different from the rest of your breast tissue. If you find a lump or other change in your breast, either during breast self-exam or by chance, you should examine the other breast. If both breasts feel the same, the lumpiness is probably normal. As you get to know your breasts better by doing breast self-exams, you should be able to tell the difference between your normal lumpiness and what may be a change.

Besides a lump or swelling, other changes in your breast might be

- skin irritation or dimpling
- nipple pain or retraction (turning inward)
- redness or scaliness of the nipple or breast skin
- a discharge other than breast milk.

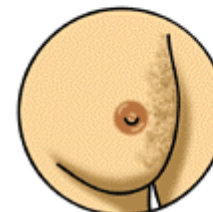
If you see any of these changes, you should see your health care provider right away.



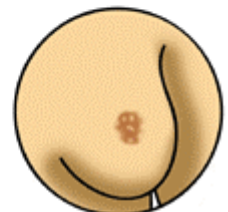
Lump



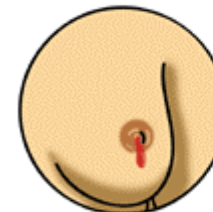
Skin dimpling



Change in skin color or texture



Change in how the nipple looks, like pulling in of the nipple.



Clear or bloody fluid that leaks out of the nipple

Is there a right way to examine my breasts?

Yes. There are several proper ways to examine your breasts. Ask your health care provider to teach you how to do a breast self-exam to make sure you are doing it correctly and thoroughly. The American Cancer Society also provides a document that shows the right way to examine your breasts. Visit their web site at:

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/cri/content/cri_2_6x_how_to_perform_a_breast_self_exam_5.asp?sitearea=CRI&viewmode=print.

Remember that you should discuss any new lump or change with your health care provider.

How often should I do a self-exam?

A breast self-exam is recommended every month a few days after your period ends. During this time, your breasts are less tender or swollen. It is important to do your breast self-exam at the same time every month.

The National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC)

A Project of the Office on Women's Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

For more information . . .

You can find out more about breast cancer in women by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center (800-994-9662) or the following organizations:

National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service

Phone: (800) 422-6237

Internet Address: <http://www.nci.nih.gov/>

American Cancer Society

Phone: (202) 4-CANCER

Internet Address: <http://www.cancer.org/>

National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program

Phone number: 1-888-842-6355 (select option 7),

Internet address: <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/index.htm>

The National Center for Human Genome Research, NIH

Phone: (301) 402-0911

Internet Address: <http://www.nhgri.nih.gov/>

National "Get A Mammogram: Do It For Yourself, Do It For Your Family" Campaign

(brochures in English, Chinese, Tagalog, and Vietnamese)

National Cancer Institute (NCI)

Phone Number(s): (800) 4-CANCER (800-422-6237)

Internet Address: <http://breasthealth.cancer.gov>

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