

Breast Care

Breast Self-Exams

It only takes about 10 minutes each month to give yourself a breast self-examination, and it is an important factor in the diagnosis of breast cancer. Check your breasts a few days after your period, when your breasts are less tender. If you are no longer menstruating, simply select a regular date for your monthly self-exam.

1. Standing in Front of the Mirror:

Start with your hands down at your sides. Look at both of your breasts to note any changes in size or shape. Also check the color and texture of your skin. Repeat these steps with your arms in the air. Then, repeat the steps while pushing down on your hips to tighten your chest muscles. Finally, examine your breasts while bending at your waist, with your hands on your hips. This will allow you to check for any dimpling of the skin.

2. Lying Down:

Place a pillow under your right shoulder and raise your right arm above or behind your head. Carefully inspect your right breast with the pads of the three middle fingers on your left hand, using a small, circular motion in an up-and-down pattern. Apply different amounts of pressure (light, medium, and firm) to each area of the breast. Make sure to check all areas where breast tissue may be found – from the armpit to the breastbone and from the collarbone to the bra line. Make sure you do not lift your fingers away from the skin at any time during the exercise. When you've finished, lower your right arm and examine your right armpit. Repeat these steps on the left breast using your right hand. These steps may be repeated while bathing or showering using soapy hands.

It is important to check the underarms, the nipples and the areas above and between your breasts.

WARNING SIGNS

- * Change in size or shape of the breast.
- * A lump or abnormal thickening of the breast.
- * Inversion or abnormal discharge from the nipple.
- * Puckering, discoloration, or dimpling of skin on breast or nipple.
- * Steady pain in localized area of the breast.
- * Sore or itchy area on single nipple.

MAMMOGRAMS AND CLINICAL BREAST EXAMS

Women aged 40 to 69 should have a mammogram to screen for breast cancer every 1 to 2 years. Your physician also should recommend that you have a clinical breast examination on a yearly basis regardless of age.