

# BREAST SELF-EXAM

## WHAT IS A BREAST SELF-EXAM?

A breast self-exam is a step-by-step method women can use to examine their breasts. By looking at and feeling your breasts regularly, you can notice anything that seems abnormal.

## WHY SHOULD I DO BREAST SELF-EXAMS?

Monthly breast self-exams can help you detect changes that may be signs of infection or breast cancer (such as breast lumps or spots that feel different). When breast cancer is detected early, the chances for survival are much better.

Self-exams are important for breast health. But they should not replace exams and screening tests (such as mammograms) recommended by doctors. You should still see your primary care provider and/or gynecologist regularly.

## Is there a particular time of the month I should do breast self-exams?

Women should do a breast self-exam once a month, every month. Women who are still menstruating (having a regular period) should perform a breast self-exam after their period. Women who have stopped menstruating and those who have very irregular periods can pick a day each month. Choose a day that is consistent and easy to remember, like the first day of the month, the last day of the month or your favorite number.

## How long does a breast exam take?

A breast self-exam takes only a few minutes and can easily be built into your daily schedule. You can do a breast exam when you're:

Dressing for the day or undressing at night.  
Lying in bed in the morning or at bedtime.  
Taking a shower.

## WHAT ARE THE STEPS OF A BREAST SELF-EXAM?

### 1. Visual inspection:

With your shirt and bra removed, stand in front of a mirror. Put your arms down by your sides. Look for any changes in breast shape, breast swelling, dimpling in the skin or changes in the nipples. Next, raise your arms high overhead and look for the same things. Finally, put your hands on your hips and press firmly to make your chest

muscles flex. Look for the same changes again. Be sure to look at both breasts.

### 2. Manual inspection while standing up:

With your shirt and bra removed, use your right hand to examine your left breast, then vice versa. With the pads of your three middle fingers, press on every part of one breast. Use light pressure, then medium, then firm. Feel for any lumps, thick spots or other changes. A circular pattern may help you make sure you hit every spot. Then, press the tissue under the arm. Be sure to check under the areola and then squeeze the nipple gently to check for discharge. Repeat the steps on the other side of your body.

### 3. Manual inspection while lying down:

When you lie down, your breast tissue spreads more evenly. So this is a good position to feel for changes, especially if your breasts are large. Lie down and put a pillow under your right shoulder. Place your right arm behind your head. Using your left hand, apply the same technique as step 2, using the pads of your fingers to press all parts of the breast tissue and under your arm. Finally, swap the pillow to the other side, and check the other breast and armpit. Be sure to check under the areola and then squeeze the nipple gently to check for discharge.

## RESULTS AND FOLLOW-UP

### When should I call my doctor about something I find in my breast self-exam?

If you find a lump or any other worrisome changes, stay calm. Most self-exam findings are not signs of breast cancer. But you should still call your healthcare provider if you notice any:

- Change in the look, feel or size of the breast.
- Change in the look or feel of the nipple.
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin.
- Lump, hard knot or thick spot in the breast tissue.
- Nipple discharge.
- Nipple or other area pulling inward.
- Pain in one spot that won't go away.
- Rash on the nipple.
- Swelling of one or both breasts.
- Warmth, redness, or dark spots on the skin.

SOURCE:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diagnostics/3990-breast-self-exam>