

Breast lump self exam

Alternative Names

Self-examination of the breast

Information

Breast cancer is easier to treat the earlier it is found. For that reason, some experts recommend that women over age 20 perform a monthly breast self exam to look for new lumps and other changes. The self exam has limitations, however, and is NOT a substitute for regular breast examinations from your doctor or screening mammograms.

Talk to your health care provider about the pros and cons of performing self exams. If you do perform monthly exams, do them 3-5 days after your period, when your breasts are the least tender and lumpy.

First, lie on your back. Place your right hand behind your head. With the middle fingers of your left hand, gently yet firmly press down using small motions to examine the entire right breast. Then, while sitting or standing, examine your armpit (commonly skipped) because breast tissue extends to that area. Gently squeeze the nipple, checking for discharge. Repeat the process on the left breast.

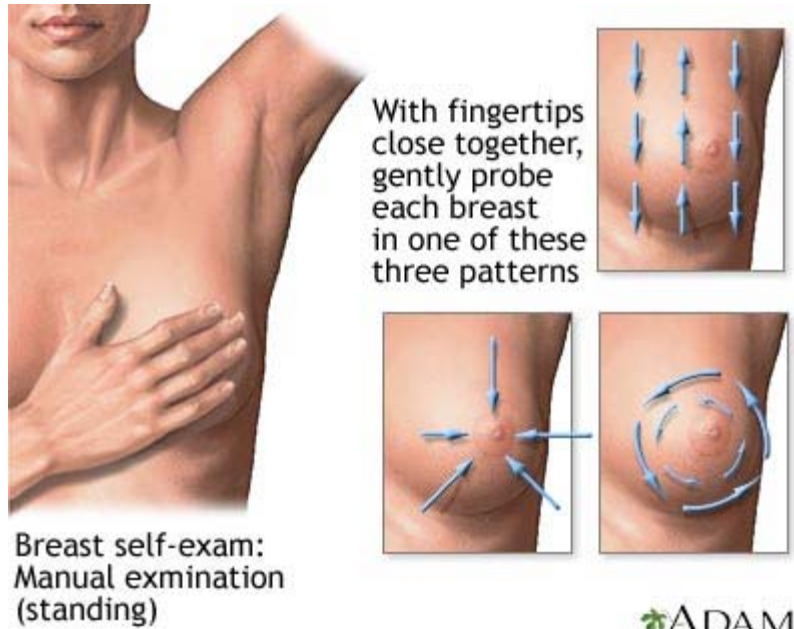
Use one of the patterns shown in the diagram to make sure that you are covering all of the breast tissue. You are feeling for any lump or thickness that stands out or feels new.

Although some women find it easiest to do the exam in the shower, when the skin is soft and wet, you are more likely to examine all of the breast tissue if you are lying down.

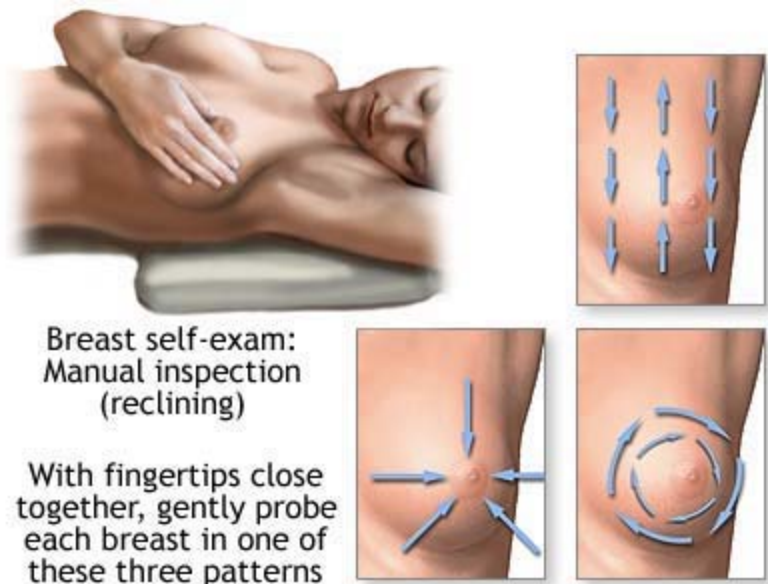
Next, stand in front of a mirror with your arms by your side. Look at your breasts directly AND in the mirror for changes in skin texture (such as dimpling, puckering, indentations, or skin that looks like an orange peel), shape, contour, or the nipple turning inward. Do the same with your arms raised above your head.

Discuss any changes you find right away with your doctor. It is helpful to know that all women have some lumps. If you do monthly exams, it is important to do them at the same time in your monthly cycle. Know that the value of monthly exams is controversial.

See also: Breast lumps



ADAM.



ADAM.

References

Smith RA, Cokkinides V, Brawley OW. Cancer Screening in the United States, 2008: A Review of Current American Cancer Society Guidelines and Cancer Screening Issues. *CA Cancer J Clin.* 2008;58;161-179.

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Reviewed By: Susan Storck, MD, FACOG, Clinical Teaching Faculty, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Washington School of Medicine; Chief, Eastside Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound, Redmond, Washington. Also reviewed by David Zieve, MD, MHA, Medical Director, A.D.A.M., Inc.

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