# Breast Self-Examination

You should begin examining your breasts at age 20 even though the risk for breast cancer is low in this age group. It is important to become familiar with how your breasts look and feel. This is true for pregnant women, nursing mothers, women in menopause and women who have breast implants.

Women should examine their breasts once a month to look for changes and lumps. By doing monthly breast exams, you get to know how your breasts feel and how they can change from month to month. This allows you to pick up changes early. It can also offer you some reassurance that your breast health is good. This exam only takes minutes. Most breast lumps are not caused by cancer. If you find a lump, a special x-ray called a mammogram, or other tests may be needed to determine what is wrong.

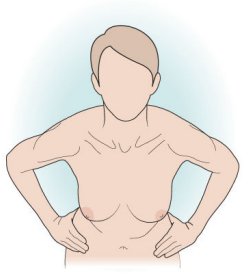
**Some of the signs that a breast lump is caused by cancer include:**

- Dimpling of the skin or changes in the shape of the breast or nipple.
- A dark-colored or bloody discharge from the nipple.
- Swollen lymph glands around the breast or in the armpit.
- Redness of the breast or nipple.
- Scaly nipple or skin on the breast.
- Pain or swelling of the breast.

## SELF EXAM

There are a **few points to follow when doing a thorough breast exam.** The best time to examine your breasts is 5 to 7 days after the menstrual period is over. During menstruation, the breasts are lumpier, and it may be more difficult to pick up changes. If you do not menstruate, have reached menopause or had a hysterectomy, examine your breasts the first day of every month. After three to four months, you will become more familiar with the variations of your breasts and more comfortable with the exam.

- Perform your breast exam monthly. Keep a written record with breast changes or normal findings for each breast. This makes it easier to be sure of changes and to not solely depend on memory for size, tenderness, or location. Try to do the exam at the same time each month, and write down where you are in your menstrual cycle if you are still menstruating.
- Look at your breasts. Stand in front of a mirror with your hands clasped behind your head. Tighten your chest muscles and look for asymmetry. This means a difference in shape or contour from one breast to the other, such as puckers, dips or bumps. Look also for skin changes.
- Lean forward with your hands on your hips. Again, look for symmetry and skin changes.
- While showering, soap the breasts, and carefully feel the breasts with fingertips while holding the arm (on the side of the breast being examined) over the head. Do this with each breast carefully feeling for lumps or changes. Typically, a circular motion with moderate fingertip pressure should be used.
- Repeat this exam while lying on your back, again with your arm behind your head and a pillow under your shoulders. Again, use your fingertips to examine both breasts, feeling for lumps and thickening. Begin at 1 o'clock and go clockwise around the whole breast.
- At the end of your exam, gently squeeze each nipple to see if there is any drainage. Look for nipple changes, dimpling or redness.
- Lastly, examine the upper chest and clavicle areas and in your armpits.



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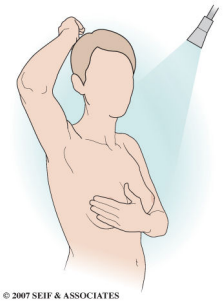

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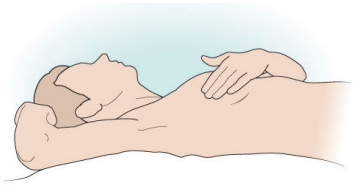

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It is not necessary to become alarmed if you find a breast lump. Most of them are not cancerous. However, it is necessary to see your caregiver if a lump is found in

order to have it looked at.

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