



How to Check Your Breasts



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Finding breast cancer early is important so you can get treatment that can save your life. Here is what you can do to help find breast cancer early:

- Get a breast exam by your doctor about every 3 years if you are in your 20s and 30s and every year if you are 40 or older.
- Know how your breasts look and feel and tell your doctor about any changes in your breasts right away. You may wish to start doing breast self-exams (BSE) when you are in your 20s. This booklet shows you how to do a breast self-exam.
- Beginning at age 40, ask your doctor if a mammogram (an x-ray of your breasts) is right for you.
- Tell your doctor if you have close relatives – such as a mother, sister, or daughter – who have had breast cancer.

How to Check Your Breasts

There are different ways of doing a breast self-exam. You may have been taught a way that is different from the one shown here. That is OK. What is important is that you find a way that works best for you.

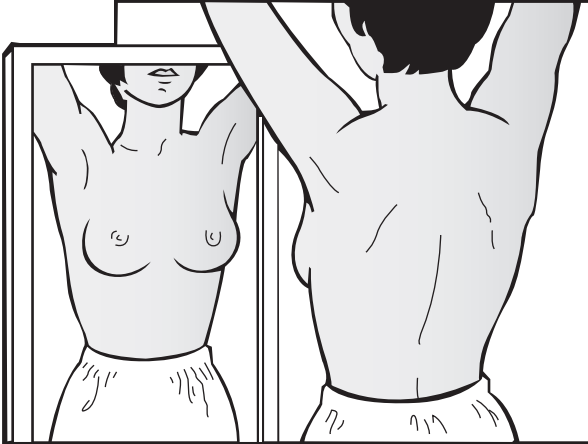
Do a breast self-exam once a month, usually about 7 to 10 days after the start of your menses. If you are no longer having periods, just pick a day and do your breast exam that same day every month – for instance, the first of the month or maybe the 15th of the month.

When doing your breast self-exam, you are looking for changes in your breasts. You are not looking for breast cancer or cysts; you are looking for something that is new or different from your exam the month before.

Here are the steps:

- Look at your breasts while you stand in front of a mirror.
- Lie down and examine your left breast with your right hand and your right breast with your left hand.
- Sit or stand and feel each underarm area.

In Front of a Mirror



Look for changes in your breasts while standing in front of a mirror.

- While standing in front of a mirror, look at your breasts with your arms by your side, then raise them over your head, then press your hands on your hips and tighten your chest muscles.
- Look for any changes in your breasts. Look for a change in size, shape, contour, dimpling, rash, redness, or scaliness of the nipple or breast skin.

Lying Down



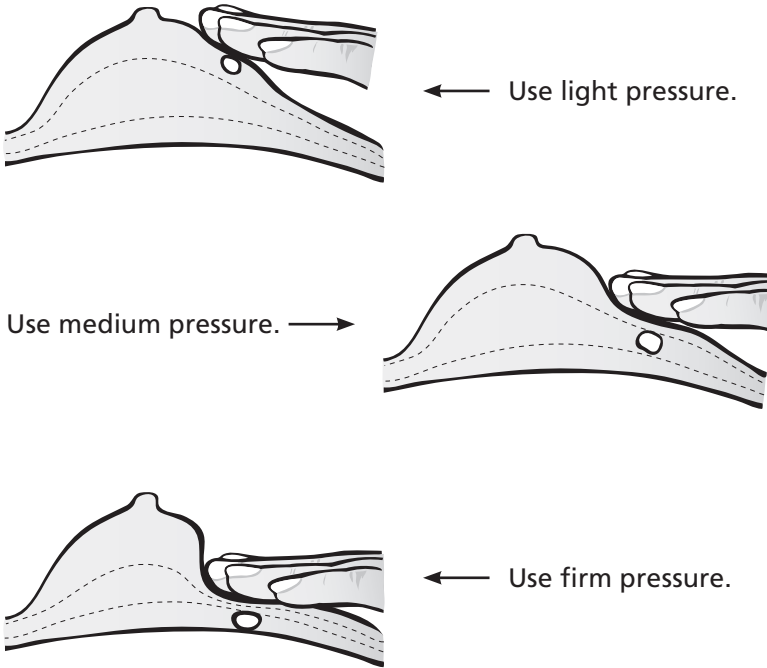
Feel for changes in your breasts when lying down.

- Lie down on your back, put a pillow under your right shoulder, and place your right arm behind your head.

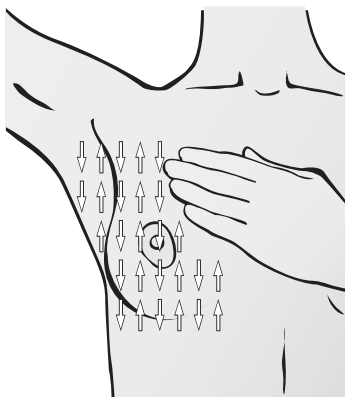


Use the finger pads and *not* the fingertips.

- Use the finger pads of the 3 middle fingers on your left hand to feel for lumps in the right breast. Use overlapping dime-sized circular motions of the finger pads to feel the breast tissue.



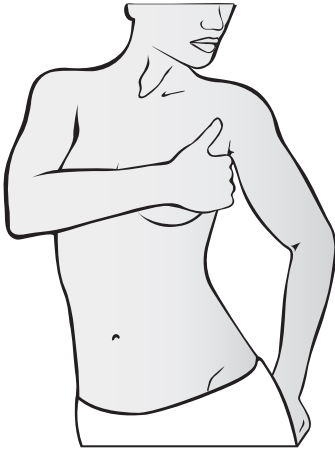
- Use 3 levels of pressure to feel all the breast tissue. Light pressure is needed to feel the tissue closest to the skin; medium pressure to feel a little deeper; and firm pressure to feel the tissue closest to the chest and ribs. A firm ridge in the lower curve of each breast is normal. Your doctor or nurse should teach you how hard to press. Use each pressure level to feel the breast tissue before moving on to the next spot.



Use an up-and-down pattern to check all of your breast.

- Use an up-and-down pattern, starting at your underarm and moving across the breast to the middle of the chest bone. Be sure to check the entire breast area going down below your breast until you feel your ribs and up to the neck or collar bone.
- Repeat the exam on your left breast, using the finger pads of the right hand.

Sitting or Standing



Sometimes, you can feel the underarm area better this way.

- While sitting up or standing and with your arm only slightly raised, feel the area under each arm.

When you first begin checking your breasts, it is hard to know what you are feeling. With practice, you will become familiar with your breasts. You might ask your nurse or doctor to help you by letting you feel your breasts as they do your breast exam.

See your doctor if you notice any of the following:

- Lump, hard knot, or thickening in the breast
- Change in size or shape of the breast
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin
- Rash, redness, or scaliness of the nipple or breast skin
- Blood-stained nipple discharge
- New breast pain that does not go away
- Recent retraction of the nipple
- Hard knot in the underarm

