

Your Self Breast Exam

STEP 1: LOOK

Begin by looking at your breasts in front of a mirror with your shoulders straight and your arms at your sides.



Check the breasts for any changes in size, shape or position, dimpling or puckering of the skin, retracted nipples, other changes in the nipple, redness, swelling or other irregularities.

Repeat this process with the hands on the hips, pressing firmly to flex the chest (pectoral muscles). Bend forward with the hands on the hips and note any irregularities.



Raise the arms overhead or put the hands behind the head. Turn to each side to check the breasts in profile. Note any *changes* in symmetry between the right and left breast. Remember, it is often normal for women to have one breast that is larger or a different shape than the other.

Next, examine the lymph nodes in each armpit and surrounding areas under the arm. Lymph nodes are normally about the size of kidney beans. Sometimes the lymph nodes may be enlarged by a non-cancerous infection. Occasionally, lymph node enlargement may be caused by a cancerous process. As with any breast or nipple changes, report any lymph node changes or enlargement to your doctor.

STEP 2: LIE DOWN

Lie down with a pillow or folded towel under the right shoulder and place the right arm behind the head.

STEP 3: TOUCH



Examine each breast separately and feel for any new lumps, changes, or irregularities. Use the pads of the fingers and practice the patterns of examination described in the above section.

Check the entire breast and armpit area using the pads of the first three middle fingers on the left hand to feel for lumps, changes, or irregularities in the right breast. A firm ridge in the lower curve of each breast is normal.

The exam should then be repeated on the left breast, using the finger pads of the right hand to examine the left breast (the pillow or folded towel should also be moved under the left shoulder at this time).



While performing BSE lying down, the nipple should also be checked for any changes. After making an initial examination, gently squeeze the nipple to check for any discharge of fluid. Note any changes in appearance or discharge. Then push the nipple deep into the hollow beneath it. Note any unusual resistance, hardness, or lump beneath the nipple.

STEP 4: STAND UP

Finally, feel your breasts while you are standing or sitting. The upper part of the breast can be hard to feel lying down. Many women find that performing breast self-examination in the shower in addition to standing in front of a mirror and lying down is helpful because the skin can be lubricated by soap. Some breast changes can be felt more easily when the skin is wet and soapy.



Raise the right arm above the head and place the right hand behind the head. Using the left hand, examine the right breast using the methods described in the above sections. Feel the breast with the pads of the index and middle fingers, moving in increasingly smaller circles from the outside inward. Compress gently, feeling for lumps. When circling the nipple, look for changes or discharge. Repeat the exam with the left breast using the right hand. Make sure to examine the area adjacent to the breast and below the armpit (this area contains breast tissue and lymph nodes).

Any persistent breast lump or abnormality of the breast or nipple should be reported to your physician as soon as possible.