

# Breast Self-Exam: Care Instructions



## Your Care Instructions

A breast self-exam is when you check your breasts for lumps or changes. This regular exam helps you learn how your breasts normally look and feel. Most breast problems or changes are not because of cancer.

Breast self-exam is not a substitute for a mammogram. Having regular breast exams by your doctor and regular mammograms improve your chances of finding any problems with your breasts.

Some women set a time each month to do a step-by-step breast self-exam. Other women like a less formal system. They might look at their breasts as they brush their teeth, or feel their breasts once in a while in the shower.

If you notice a change in your breast, tell your doctor.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How do you do a breast self-exam?

- The best time to examine your breasts is usually one week after your menstrual period begins. Your breasts should not be tender then. If you do not have periods, you might do your exam on a day of the month that is easy to remember.
- To examine your breasts:
  - Remove all your clothes above the waist and lie down. When you are lying down, your breast tissue spreads evenly over your chest wall, which makes it easier to feel all your breast tissue.
  - Use the pads—not the fingertips—of the 3 middle fingers of your left hand to check your right breast. Move your fingers slowly in small coin-sized circles that overlap.
  - Use three levels of pressure to feel of all your breast tissue. Use light pressure to feel the tissue close to the skin surface. Use medium pressure to feel a little deeper. Use firm pressure to feel your tissue close to your breastbone and ribs. Use each pressure level to feel your breast tissue before moving on to the next spot.
  - Check your entire breast, moving up and down as if following a strip from the collarbone to the bra line, and from the armpit to the ribs. Repeat until you have covered the entire breast.
  - Repeat this procedure for your left breast, using the pads of the 3 middle fingers of your right hand.
- To examine your breasts while in the shower:
  - Place one arm over your head and lightly soap your breast on that side.
  - Using the pads of your fingers, gently move your hand over your breast (in the strip pattern described above), feeling carefully for any lumps or changes.
  - Repeat for the other breast.
- Have your doctor inspect anything you notice to see if you need further testing.

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