



How often should I have a breast exam?

It is important to do your breast self exam every month, as lumps may develop substantially within a year's time. Careful monthly exams enable you to become familiar with your own breast tissue, so that you can detect very small changes. The best time for a breast self-exam is between 3-7 days after your period, when your breasts are not swollen or tender. Breast lumps are frequently found by a woman or her sex partner. Most lumps are not cancerous, but it is vital that you report any unusual finding to your provider as soon as possible.

How do I do my own breast exam?

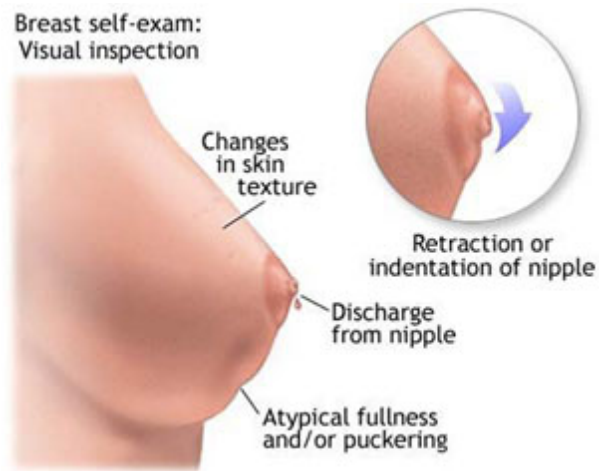
VISUAL INSPECTION:

Stand in front of a mirror and place your hands on your hips. Inspect each breast for any changes in shape, form or size. Do this again with your arms raised above your head, first looking at the front and then turning to each side.



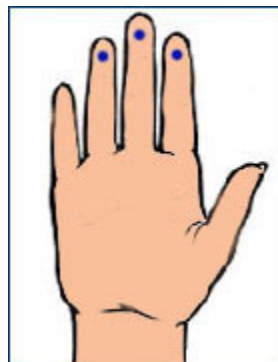


While still standing, place one hand behind your head. Hold the fingers of the other hand flat, and gently touch every part of the breast below the raised arm. Check for lumps, bumps, or thickening. Check the other breast in a similar manner.



BASIC PALPATION:

Lie back with a folded towel or pillow under your right shoulder. Place your right hand behind your head. Use the flats of your middle three fingers. At each spot you examine, stop and move the flats of your fingers in three small circles—about the size of a dime.



Lumps can occur at any depth, and movable lumps can be missed because they are easily pushed out of the way. Because of this fact, you need to use three levels of pressure to examine each spot thoroughly.

Gently press in small circles, using very light pressure on your first circle, just enough to move the skin, but not disturb the tissue underneath.



On your second circle, press midway into the tissue. Be sure to keep your fingers flat.

The third circle is deeper pressure to find lumps deep in the breast tissue. Press as firmly as you can without discomfort. Most women can feel their ribs with this third, deep circle.

You can start these circles at the top outermost edge and use a vertical pattern to examine your entire breast area. Evidence has shown that this vertical method is the superior method for detection. Your clinician, however, may give you other instructions. Feel for lumps, bumps, or thickening. Be sure to use a consistent pattern. Do not miss any part of the breast. It is best to use the following vertical strip method:

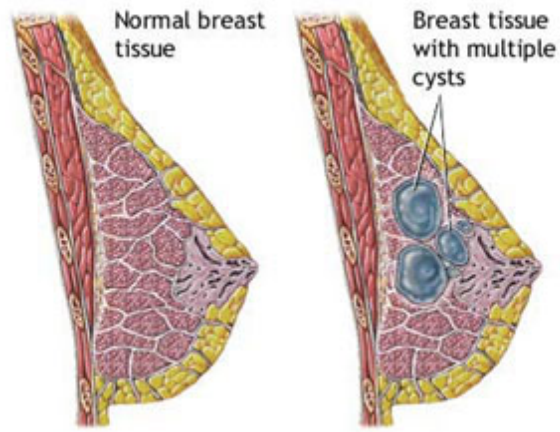


Now repeat this same process on the other breast.

The last step involves checking the underarm. This can best be done by resting your arm on a firm surface like the top of the bookshelf. Examine the underarm, feeling for lumps, bumps, or thickening. Repeat on the other underarm.



The more familiar you become with your own breast tissue, the easier it will be for you to detect any abnormalities that may develop. While visual inspection is important, you also should know what suspicious lumps feel like. We do have several breast model kits available to be checked out here at the Health Center. You can ask your provider for further assistance, or one of the two nurse Mamma Care® specialists in breast exams, who work at the Campus Health Center (Kris or Marilyn).



Annual exams and monthly breast self exams are only two of the three ways to protect yourself from breast cancer. Another method is mammography—x-ray photographs of the breasts. Mammography may be able to detect a lump up to two years before it can be felt. Younger women whose families have a history of breast cancer should ask their providers about whether or not mammograms would be of any value to them. Women over 40 should have mammograms every year.