

Self Breast Examination Instructions

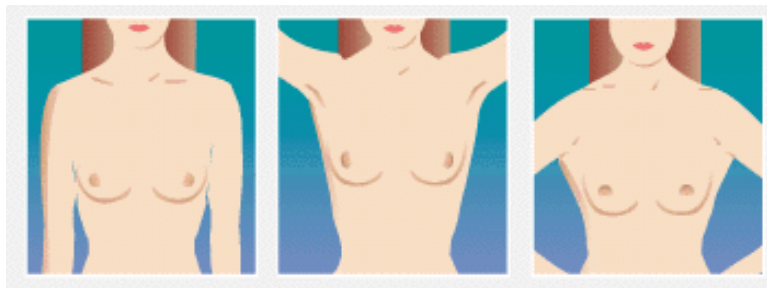
Several studies have shown that women who do not palpate their breasts are twice as likely to have lymph node involvement at the time of a breast cancer diagnosis. Self-breast examinations do not prevent breast cancer, but they can help to reduce the risk of dying from breast cancer as tumours are detected sooner and treatment can begin earlier. The key to success is familiarity through repetition.

It is best to perform a self-breast examination at the same time of your cycle each month. If you are still menstruating, pick a time about 7-10 days after your menses begins. If you are no longer menstruating, perform the examination at the same time each month (i.e. beginning of the month).

The breast examination consists of 2 stages:

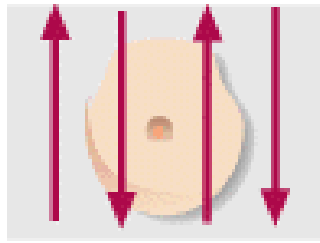
1. Visual Exam

- Stand in front of a mirror. With each of the following positions, observe your breasts in the mirror. Each position highlights a different part of your breast. Be watchful for any *dimpling, puckering, bulging, irregularities, asymmetry, or changes in size*. Look for any changes in your nipple such as nipple inversion or displacement to one side. Notice any changes in skin colour or texture.
- The positions are as follows:
 - Place your hands on your hips and apply pressure. Examine the contour of your breasts, noticing any irregularities.
 - Slowly raise both arms above your head, stretching them up high. Examine your breasts and the underarm area.
 - With your arms above your head, clasp your hands together and bring them down behind your head. Pull your elbows back and squeeze your hands together. Look for any changes in the appearance of your breasts and underarm area.
 - Bend forward from your hips until your nipples point down, resting your hand on your knees.



2. Palpation Exam

- Gently, but firmly, feel the breasts to detect any unusual thickening or lumps. The preferred method of self breast examination involves a 'vertical strip' pattern:



- Hold the first 2 or 3 fingers of one hand close together. Use the pads of those fingers to palpate the opposite breast. Make small circles with your fingers as you press towards the ribcage, moving the skin with your fingers. Use different levels of pressure so that you can detect lumps at various depths. Follow the pattern suggested above and use it consistently.
- Some women prefer to do their breast examination while in the shower. You can do this by placing your hand on the side being examined behind your head.
- If you have larger breasts, it may be easier to perform the breast exam in a lying down position. Place a towel or pillow under your shoulder to support and stabilize the breast that you are examining, with the hand on the side being examined behind your head. The opposite hand is then used to palpate the breast.



- Breast tissue extends from the collarbone to just below the fold of skin under your breasts, and from the middle of your chest (sternum) to your side and armpit. Be sure to palpate the entire area. Also palpate the area above the collarbone, known as the supraclavicular area. Occasionally breast cancer may be detected as persistent, swollen lymph nodes in this area or in the armpit. As you complete the palpation of your breast, finish by squeezing each nipple to notice if there is any discharge. Unusual or bloody discharge warrants further examination.

Kaur, Sat Dharam. *The Complete Natural Medicine Guide to Breast Cancer*. 2010.