

Self-examination of breasts

Why examine your breasts?

- Regular breast self-examination (BSE) helps you become familiar with the usual feel of your breasts.
- You will detect any lumps in the breast at an early stage of their development.
- Although only 1 in 10 breast lumps is cancer, 1 in 15 women develops breast cancer at some time.
- Most breast cancers are found (as a lump) by the woman, not by the doctor.

Early detection of a lump—if it is a breast cancer—may mean a better chance of a cure.

By performing regular BSE, you are safeguarding your health.

What is the technique?

There are several BSE methods. No matter which you use, it is important that you examine your breasts regularly and that you cover the breast area completely.

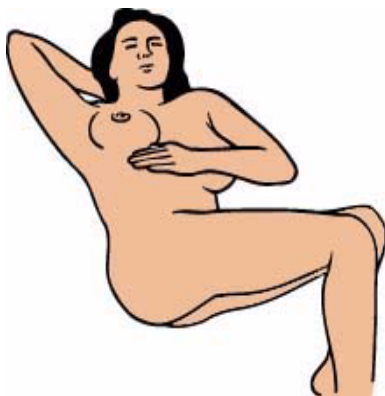
The method outlined here is simple, easy to learn and provides good coverage of the entire breast.

When should it be done?

Breast examination should be done once a month a few days after the end of your period.

Position

- The breast tissue must be spread as flat as possible.
- Lie on your back with one arm behind your head. The right breast is examined by the left hand and vice versa.
- Large-breasted women might need to modify this position. First lie on your side, then bring your shoulders flat onto the bed. Once you have examined as far as the nipple, lie flat on your back to examine the remainder of the breast.

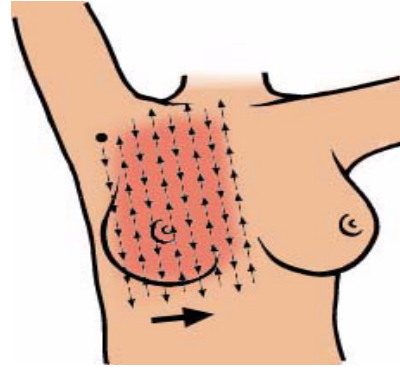


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Boundaries of the 'map'

Your examination must cover the breast tissue area completely. The boundaries are:

- the collarbone
- the brassiere line
- the breastbone
- a line vertical from the middle of the underarm



Examination

Vertical strips

Examine up and down the breast in vertical 'strips', beginning from the outer border. At the end of each strip, move the fingers about 2 cm towards the breastbone and examine another vertical strip.

The flat of your fingers

Use the flat part of your fingers, including the fingertip pads, to feel the breast. Move your hand in *slow, circular* movements.

Light and firm pressure

At each spot feel first with *light pressure* (to detect any lump just below the surface), then with a *firm pressure* (to detect any lump near the ribs).

When finished, reverse the position to examine the other breast.

What should you do if you find a lump or thickening?

If you find a lump, dimpling of the skin, or a discharge, make sure you see your doctor as soon as possible. Please do not be afraid or put it off. Most changes are not cancer.