

Breast Self – Exam

What is a Breast Self – Exam?

It's way for one to check their breasts for changes, such as lumps or thickenings. One will have to look at and feel both breasts. If anything unusual is noticed, a doctor should be consulted. In many cases, the changes aren't cancer but consulting a doctor is a must to confirm.

A. How to self-examine using a mirror:

- 1) Stand undressed from the waist up in front of a large mirror in a well-lit room. Look at your breasts. If they aren't equal in size or shape, that's OK! Most women's breasts aren't. With your arms relaxed by your sides, look for any changes in size, shape, or position, or any breast skin changes. Look for any puckering, dimpling, sores, or discoloration.
- 2) Check your nipples and look for any sores, peeling, or change in their direction.
- 3) Place your hands on your hips and press down firmly to tighten the chest muscles beneath your breasts. Turn from side to side so you can look at the outer part of your breasts.
- 4) Then bend forward toward the mirror. Roll your shoulders and elbows forward to tighten your chest muscles. Your breasts will fall forward. Look for any changes in their shape or contour.
- 5) Now, clasp your hands behind your head and press your hands forward. Again, turn from side to side to inspect your breasts' outer portions. Remember to look at the border underneath them. You may need to lift your breasts with your hand to see it.
- 6) Check your nipples for discharge fluid. Place your thumb and forefinger on the tissue surrounding the nipple and pull outward toward the end of the nipple. Look for any discharge. Repeat on your other breast.

B. How to self-examine in the shower:

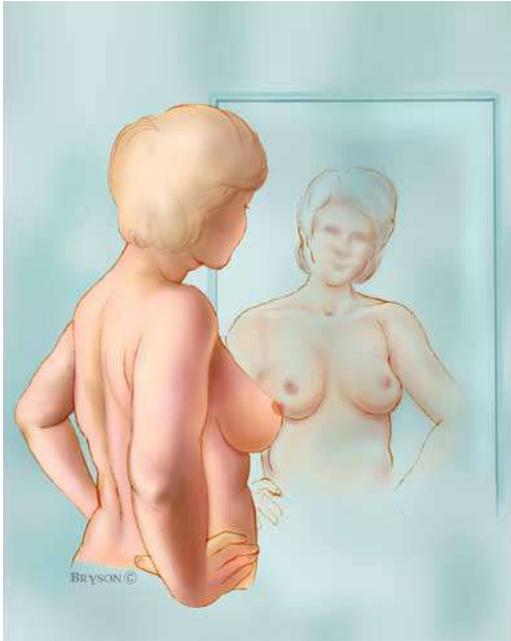
- 7) Feel for changes in the breast. It helps to have your hands slippery with soap and water. Check for any lumps or thickening in your underarm area. Place your left hand on your hip and reach with your right hand to feel in the left armpit. Repeat on the other side.
- 8) Check both sides for lumps or thickenings above and below your collarbone.
- 9) With hands soapy, raise one arm behind your head to spread out the breast tissue. Use the flat part of your fingers from the other hand to press gently into the breast. Follow an up-and-down pattern, moving from bra line to collarbone. Continue the pattern until you have covered the entire breast. Repeat on the other side.

C. How to carry out a self-examination lying down:

- 1) Lie down and place a small pillow or folded towel under your right shoulder. Put your right hand behind your head. Place your left hand on the upper portion of your right breast with fingers together and flat. Body lotion may help to make this easier.
- 2) Think of your breast as a face on a clock. Start at 12 o'clock and move toward 1 o'clock in small circular motions. Continue around the entire circle until you reach 12 o'clock again. Keep your fingers flat and in constant contact with your breast. When the circle is complete, move in 1 inch toward the nipple and complete another circle around the clock. Continue in this pattern until you've felt the entire breast. Make sure to feel the upper outer areas that extend into your armpit.

- 3) Place your fingers flat and directly on top of your nipple. Feel beneath the nipple for any changes. Gently press your nipple inward. It should move easily.
- 4) Repeat these steps on your other breast. Don't forget to check the upper, outer area of the breast, nearest to the armpit.

As per Breastcancer.org, one should follow the following 5 steps for a Breast Self - Exam



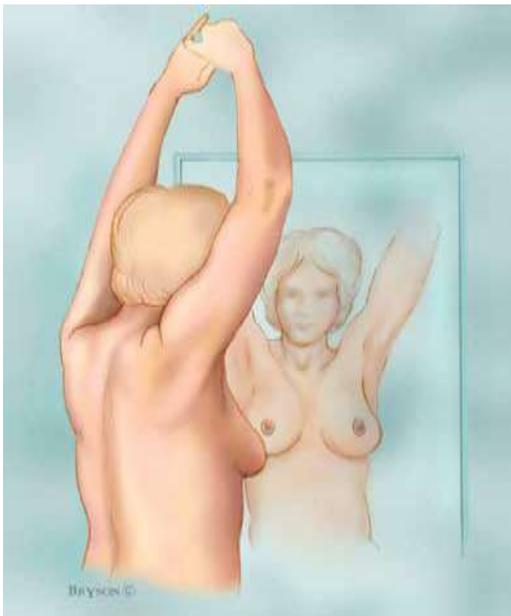
Begin by looking at your breasts in the mirror with your shoulders straight and your arms on your hips.

Here's what you should look for:

- Breasts that are their usual size, shape, and color.
- Breasts that are evenly shaped without visible distortion or swelling.

If you see any of the following changes, bring them to your doctor's attention:

- Dimpling, puckering, or bulging of the skin
- A nipple that has changed position or an inverted nipple (pushed inward instead of sticking out)
- Redness, soreness, rash, or swelling



Step 2: Now, raise your arms and look for the same changes.

Step 3: While you're at the mirror, look for any signs of fluid coming out of one or both nipples (this could be a watery, milky, or yellow fluid or blood).

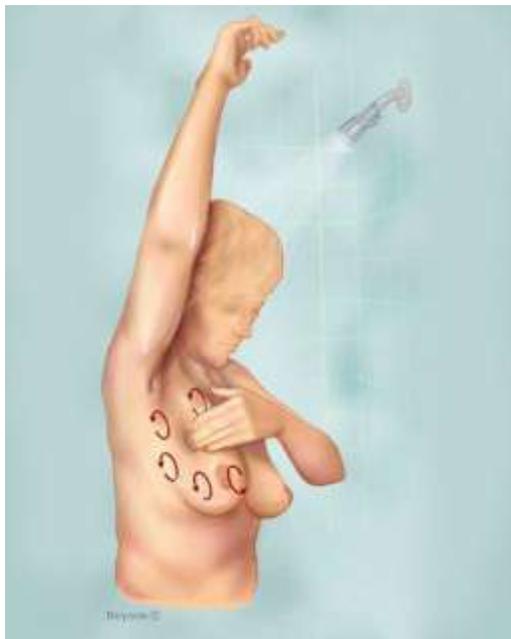


Step 4: Feel your breasts while lying down, using your right hand to feel your left breast and then your left hand to feel your right breast. Use a firm, smooth touch with the first few fingers of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together.

Cover the entire breast from top to bottom, side to side—from your collarbone to the top of your abdomen, and from your armpit to your cleavage.

Follow a pattern to be sure that you cover the whole breast. You can begin at the nipple, moving in larger and larger circles until you reach the outer edge of the breast.

You can also move your fingers up and down vertically, in rows, as if you were mowing a lawn. This up-and-down approach seems to work best for most women. Be sure to feel all the tissue from the front to the back of your breasts: for the skin and tissue just beneath, use light pressure; use medium pressure for tissue in the middle of your breasts; use firm pressure for the deep tissue in the back. When you've reached the deep tissue, you should be able to feel down to your ribcage.



Step 5: Finally, feel your breasts while you are standing or sitting. Many women find that the easiest way to feel their breasts is when their skin is wet and slippery, so they like to do this step in the shower. Cover your entire breast, using the same hand movements described in Step 4.

Sources:

- 1) Brooklyn Women's Service
- 2) Breastcancer.org