



## Self Breast Exams and Breast Health Every Woman Should Know

### BREAST HEALTH

#### (Frequently Asked Questions)

#### **When should a woman start performing self breast examination (SBE)?**

It is generally recommended that a woman begin examining her breasts after they are fully developed (at puberty). Consequently, age will vary with individuals.

#### **Why should I check my breasts?**

Regular examination will help you understand what is normal for your breasts. When you notice a change, you should contact your physician and let them know. Only a professional can help determine what is normal and what may require further evaluation. Don't be "afraid of finding something". The sooner breast cancer is found, the better your chances of recovery.

#### **Is there a certain time of the month that is better for SBE?**

Breasts may become tender and swollen prior to and during a woman's period. Once these symptoms have passed, examination can be done more easily. Try to do your examination around the same time each month as hormone fluctuations can affect the way your breast tissue feels.

#### **What am I looking for when I do my exam?**

The breast consists of a nipple, surrounded by a darker area called the areola. Underneath the skin covering the rounded part of the breast, there are ducts and lobules, and underneath that is the pectoralis muscle. All or any of these parts may be detected on examination. Breasts vary greatly in size, shape, and texture. Only regular monthly examination will allow you to become familiar enough with your breasts to know when something "is not right".

Any new lump or existing lump that has grown in size may be suspicious. If you have "lumpy breasts" to begin with, this may be normal for you. Compare both breasts to determine if they are similar. This type of "symmetry" typically is not suspicious. Discharge from the nipple is not "normal" unless pregnant or breastfeeding. Also take note of any changes in color or texture as these should also be reported.

#### **What can I do to improve my breast health?**

Stay active, exercise, and eat a good diet. Do not sleep wearing a bra or sports bra. Err on the side of caution. If you are concerned about your breast health, follow up with your provider. The following website has a good example of how to conduct a comprehensive self breast exam:  
<http://women.webmd.com/healthtool-self-breast-exam>