

Breast Self-Examination

a brief guide by Mr Iqbal Kasana

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Breast cancer being so common (affects 1 in 8 women in lifetime) and curable if detected at an earlier stage it is imperative for every woman to do monthly Breast Self-Examination. This is the commonest way of detection of breast cancer and detecting early saves life. The other way of detection (breast screening mammography) is started only after the age of 47 and currently detects

less than 3rd of breast cancers. The remaining 70% of the cancers are detected by women themselves by self-examination. Therefore, importance of self examination cannot be overemphasised in detecting early and at curable stage.



What age to start self-examination?

Breast cancer is rare before the age of 20 but is seen in twenties especially in families carrying cancer genes. So it is advisable to do routine self-examination from the age of 20.

How often one should check?

It is advisable to do once monthly. Doing less often could lead to missing cancer and doing too frequently makes it difficult to detect subtle changes.

What is the right time to do self-examination and how often?

Right frequency for self-examination is monthly, ideally done mid-cycle i.e. one week after the end of each menstrual period.

Technique

3 Components of breast self-examination:

- Visual inspection of breasts and armpits in front of a mirror
- Physical examination of breasts and armpit
- Physical examination of breasts and armpit in shower with shower gel on.

Step 1 Visual Inspection

Begin by looking at your breasts in the mirror in upright position with your arms down by your side first and then on your hips.



Step 1: Visual inspection of breasts and armpits standing in front of mirror with arms down first and then arms raised above head.

Here you should look for:

- Breasts for normal size, shape, and colour
- Any visible distortion or swelling
- Dimpling, puckering, or bulging of the skin
- A nipple that has changed position or an inverted nipple (pushed inward instead of sticking out) or any fluid discharge from your nipple.
- Redness, rash, or swelling

□ - Now, raise your arms and look for the same changes enumerated above.

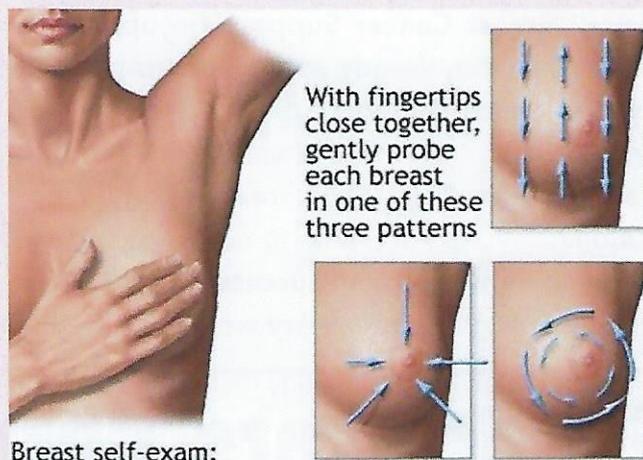
Step 2 : Physical Examination of Breast & Armpit: feel your breasts while lying down on a bed with a pillow underneath between your shoulders and arm rose above the head (of the side to be examined). This spreads your breast on the chest making easier to feel for lumps.



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Use 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 finger pads of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together. Use a circular motion using variable (increasing and decreasing) level of pressure. Light pressure is helpful detecting superficial lumps and firm pressure for deeper lumps.

Cover the entire breast from top to bottom, side to side — from your collar bone to the top of your abdomen, and from your armpit to your cleavage. Follow a pattern to ensure 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. 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 at the back of breasts. When you've reached the deep tissue, you should be able to feel down to your ribcage. Similarly feel both armpits for any lumps.



Breast self-exam: Manual examination

Fig: pattern to follow to ensure covering whole breast

Here you should look for: Any nodule (lump), pebble or thickening.

Step 3: Feel your breasts while you are in shower with shower gel on you.

Finally, feel your breasts while you are upright position. Ideal time is in shower with shower gel on you. Shower gel reduces friction and makes you fingers slip over breast and helps feeling for lumps. Cover your entire breast and armpit, using the same hand movements described in step 2.



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For your guide to Breast Self- Examination, type into:

YouTube

"Breast self-examination guide how to detect changes"
By Mr. Iqbal Kasana

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