



The Center for Women

Obstetrics & Gynecology

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Breast Self-Examination

You should examine your breasts because:

- 95% of breast lumps treated by doctors are found by women themselves;
- Most women with breast cancer are cured if they are treated early; and
- Most breast lumps are not cancerous.

What to look for:

- Changes in size or shape of your breasts or position of your nipples;
- Inward puckering of the skin or nipple;
- Sores or scaling of the nipple or areola (darker skin around the nipple);
- Redness of skin; and
- Enlargement of skin pore.

How to look for changes:

- Begin the exam in front of a mirror with your arms relaxed at your side or on your lap and look for the changes described above;
- Hold your arms straight over your head and repeat your inspection;
- Put your hands on your waist and push firmly inward & look once more for any changes;
- Gently squeeze the nipple of each breast and look for discharge.

What to feel for:

- Any changes from previous exams; and
- Any lump or thickening.

How to feel for changes:

- Lie down and with flat of your fingers, feel for lumps, left hand on right breast, then right hand on left breast. Move fingers around breast as if it were a face of a clock, and be sure to cover the entire breast from the outer edges to the nipple. “Walk” fingers thoroughly in concentric circles, and then squeeze under nipple. Look for a lump or a knot that was not there before; quite hard, perhaps the size of a nickel or larger and feel of your knuckle. Be sure to cover the entire breast;
- If any changes are noted, call your doctor.

When to do the exam:

- Do the exam on the day your menstrual period ends;
- If you have reached menopause, examine your breasts on the same day each month, such as the first, fifteenth, or a day you’ll remember;
- If you are pregnant, examine your breasts on the same day each month;
- If you have had a hysterectomy and have monthly breasts changes (swelling or tenderness), examine your breasts on the day these changes disappear;
- If you no longer have monthly breasts changes, examine your breasts on the same day of each month.