

# BREAST SELF-EXAM

## “BSE”

### *What is a Breast Self-Exam (BSE)?*

A breast self-exam is when you check your own breasts for nipple discharge, lumps, changes in size or shape of the breast, or any other changes in the breasts or underarm (armpit). Breast self-exam takes little time, costs nothing and can help you be aware of how your breasts normally look and feel. Call your health care provider if you discover any changes in your breasts or underarms. Remember, most breast changes are NOT cancer but DO follow-up with your healthcare provider to be sure!

### *When should a Breast Self-Exam (BSE) be done?*

All women age 20 and older should do breast self-exams — even during pregnancy and after menopause (when you no longer have periods). Also, all men who are at high risk for breast cancer should do a breast self-exam.

Breast self-examination should be done every month.

- If you still have a period, the best time to do BSE is when your breasts are least likely to be tender or swollen, such as 5 to 10 days after the start of your period.
- If you no longer have a period, pick a certain day—such as the first day of each month—to remind yourself to do BSE.
- If you are pregnant, check your breasts on the first day of each month.
- If you are breastfeeding (nursing) check your breasts on the first day of the month after you empty your breasts.

### *How to do a breast self-exam:*

Examine your breasts by looking and feeling up to the collarbone, out to the armpit, into the middle of the chest and down to the bottom of the rib cage.

#### **LOOK AT YOUR BREASTS IN THE MIRROR!**

Begin by looking at your breasts in front of the mirror with your hands pressing in on your hips. Look for changes in size, shape, or dimpling, or redness or scaliness of the nipple or breast skin. (Pressing in on your hips shrinks the chest wall muscles and makes any breast changes more visible.)

#### **FEEL YOUR BREASTS!**

The most recent recommendation for checking your breasts is to lie down on your back and place your right arm behind your head. The exam is done while lying down, not standing up. This is because when lying down the breast tissue spreads evenly over the chest wall and is as thin as possible, making it much easier to feel all the breast tissue and for anything that is not normal for you. Use the finger pads of the three middle fingers on your left hand to feel for lumps in the right breast.

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Use overlapping dime-sized circular motions of the finger pads to feel the tissue closest to the skin; medium pressure to feel a little deeper; and firm pressure to feel the tissue closest to the chest and ribs. If you are not sure how hard to press, talk with your healthcare provider. Use light, medium and firm pressure to feel the breast tissue before moving to the next spot.

Move around the breast in an up and down pattern starting at an imaginary line drawn straight down your side from the underarm and moving across the breast to the middle of the chest bone (sternum or breastbone). Be sure to check the entire breast area going down the breast until you feel only ribs and up the breast to the neck or collar bone (clavicle).

Repeat the exam on your left breast, putting your left arm behind your head and using the finger pads of your right hand to do the exam.

Although the above procedure for doing breast self-exam is different from previous recommendations, there is evidence that this position (lying down), the area felt, pattern of coverage of the breast, and use of different amounts of pressure increase a woman's ability to find abnormal areas. However, you may still check your breasts while showering or getting dressed. The important thing to remember is **just check your breasts!**

### **SITTING OR STANDING - FEEL!**

Examine each underarm while sitting up or standing and with your arm only *slightly* raised so you can easily feel in this area. Do not raise your arm straight up because this tightens the tissue in this area and makes it harder to examine.

### **GET IT RIGHT!**

Show your healthcare provider how you are doing your breast self-exam (BSE). Ask them to tell you if you need to do anything different. **EARLY DETECTION IS YOUR BEST PROTECTION!**

### **REMEMBER:**

See your healthcare provider if you notice any of these changes in your breasts:

- Lump, hard knot or thickening
- Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening
- Change in the size or shape
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin
- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
- Pulling in of your nipple or other parts
- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly
- New pain in one spot that does not go away