

A Simple Check Can Make a Difference

Conducting a Breast Self-Exam

There are various ways to detect breast cancer in the earliest stages of the disease. Self-exams are one way to be mindful of potential changes in the breasts and bring them to the attention of medical professionals.

While self-exams can help individuals learn how their bodies normally look and feel, major medical organizations like the American Cancer Society no longer recommend doing formal, regimented monthly self-exams. Instead, there is a greater push toward breast self-awareness. According to BreastCancer.org, regular step-by-step self-exams do not decrease breast cancer mortality rates. In some instances, they can cause unnecessary anxiety and lead to biopsies after the discovery of benign lumps. But it can still be helpful to learn how to conduct a self-exam and incorporate it into a preventive health care routine.

Here's how to conduct an exam, courtesy of BreastCancer.org.

1. Examine your breasts in the mirror with hands on hips. Look for breasts that are evenly shaped without visible distortion or swelling. Also look to ensure that the breasts are their usual size, shape and color.
2. Now raise your arms and look for the same things.
3. Look for signs of fluid coming out of one or both nipples.
4. Lie down, and use your right hand to feel your left breast. Then switch to use your left hand to feel your right breast. Use a firm, smooth touch with the first few finger pads of your hand. Press down with your fingers and move them in a circular motion that's about the size of an inch around. Go around each breast from top to bottom, side to side. Be sure to follow a pattern to be sure to cover the entire breast

from collarbone to the top of the abdomen, and from your armpit to your cleavage.

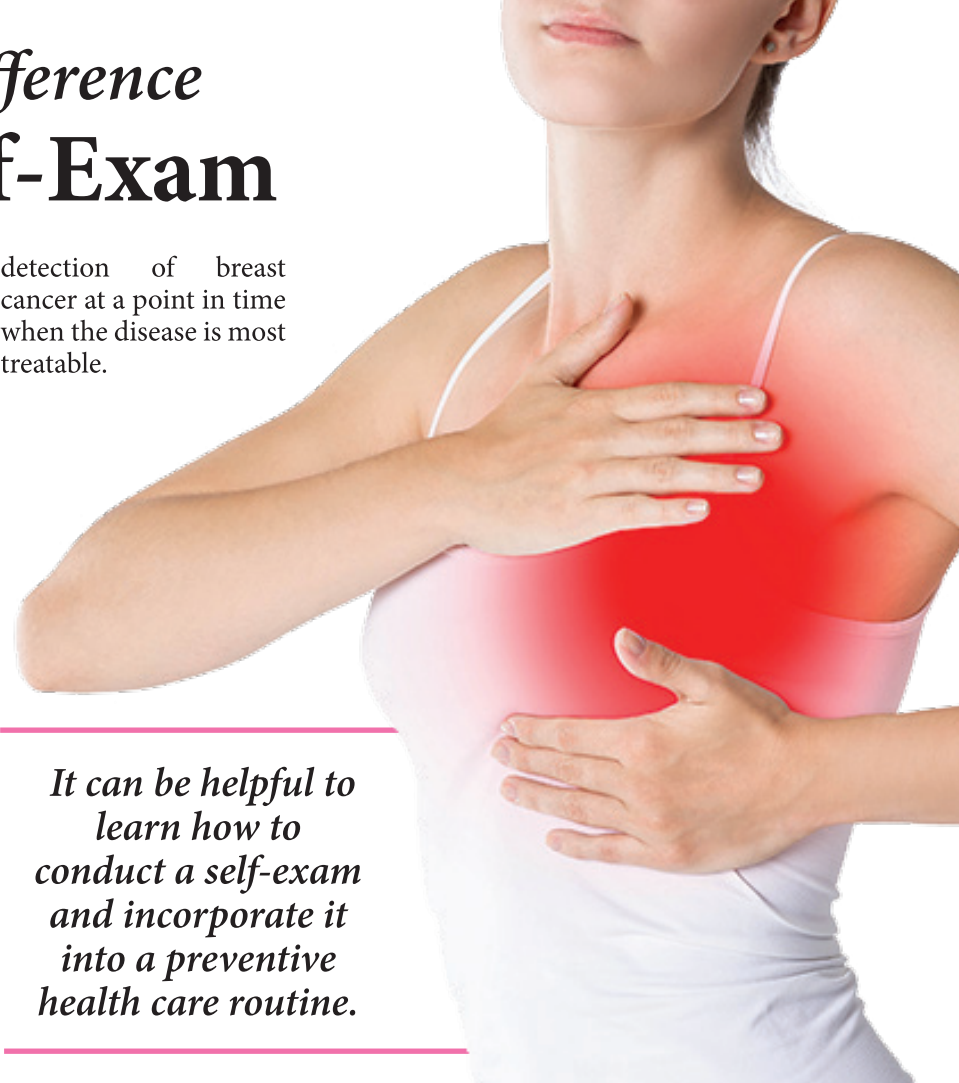
5. Feel your breasts while you are standing or sitting. Many people find that the easiest way to self-examine their breasts is in the shower when the skin is slippery. Conduct the same hand movements as in step 4.

While many lumps are benign, women should not hesitate to call the doctor to check out a new lump or breast change that concerns them.

Getting to know one's breasts through self-exam can lead to early

detection of breast cancer at a point in time when the disease is most treatable.

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