

The Importance of Breast Examinations



WHO SHOULD CHECK?

Breast examinations are important for women and men. Now, I can just hear you saying... “Men checking their breasts for lumps?” Yes! Men and women can be diagnosed with Breast Cancer. The numbers of men are much lower than women but none the less, it can happen to men, especially those men who have extra adipose tissue in the breast area creating a breast-like appearance. Those men who do not have this extra tissue would notice changes much easier because a lump would show up on their chest very clearly.

One thing you do need to remember though, is that during puberty, adolescent breasts are naturally changing and for women, will feel different as the mammary glands inside develop and the breast grows larger (for some of us!!!). By learning about how your breasts feel at an early age, changes will become evident to you at an sooner than someone who is not sure what their breasts normally feel like. If you have any concerns when you perform a self-breast examination (SBE), you can discuss this with your doctor. As you get older, your doctor will ask if you would like a breast examination done by them. Also, women over the age of 50 years should have a mammogram done every 2 years, however if cancer runs in your family, you may request a mammogram at an earlier age.

WHEN?

- ON the SAME DAY of each month, 7-10 days after the first day of your period
- CHOOSE THE SAME DAY OF EACH MONTH , if you are pregnant or during/after menopause
- SCHEDULE ONCE EACH YEAR an examination by your nurse or doctor

Most of the time the changes women find in their breasts are not cancer. If you do find a change in your breasts, whether you are a man or a woman, see your doctor.

WHAT SHOULD I CHECK FOR?

You are looking for changes in your breasts. First, you need to learn what is normal for **your** breasts. This may seem funny but it may be normal for your breasts to feel a bit lumpy compared to another person’s breasts. You should check for any new place in your breast that feels thicker or harder than the rest of your breast.

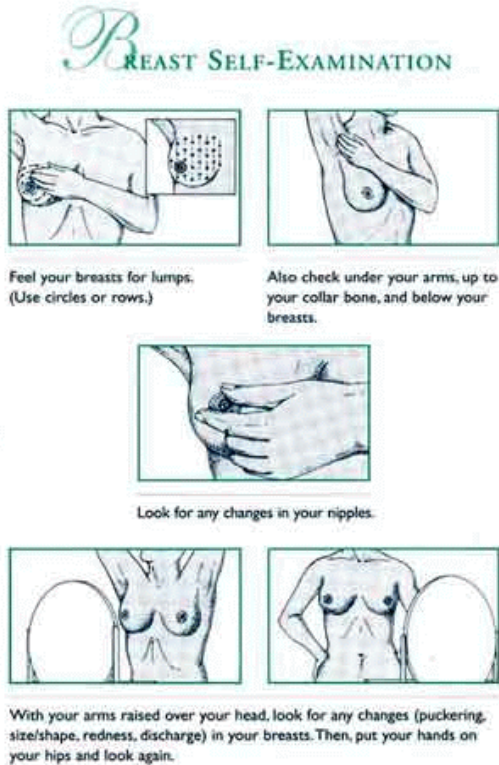
- new lumps or thickenings; new dimples; creases or folds
- anything that distorts the curve of the breast; changes in shape or size, including the nipple area
- things you can see or feel in one breast but not in the other
- red or hot areas
- areas that have an “orange peel” texture
- fluids leaking from nipples

HOW SHOULD I EXAMINE MY BREASTS?

- For each breast, use the middle 3 fingers of your opposite hand
- Keep fingers flat and close together
- Use only the pads of your fingers- not the fingertips
- Think of the entire breast area as a “clock”
- Start with your fingers at the collar bone (at 12 o’clock)
- using a constant, firm pressure make SMALL CIRCLES with your fingers working downwards and including your nipple

- repeat this pattern for each “HOUR” position
- always include breast tissue in the area under the arms (1 o’clock to 4 o’clock)

If your breasts are large they may fold over on your chest. This fold may feel like a firm ridge. Do no panic. This ridge is normal for large breasts. Lift them up to check all parts for changes.



WHERE?

First...Before a Mirror

Always begin checking your breast by standing in front of a mirror. Leave your arms by your side. Look at your breasts. Slowly turn from side to side. Are there any changes from the last time you looked, in size and shape? Check for rashes or puckery skin. Look for any discharge from your nipples.

Lift your arms above your head still looking in the mirror. Put your hands behind your ears. Look at your breasts and under your arms. Lower your hands to your nose. Squeeze your palms together. Are there any changes? Check under your arm too because there are lymph nodes that could have lumps growing. Relax your arm by your side.

Second..In the Shower

- Soapy fingers glide and “feel” the breast tissue easily
- Place one hand behind the head
- Examine the breast with opposite hand use CIRCULAR, CLOCKWISE pattern.
- Repeat for other breast

Third...Lying down

- Hand lotion helps for smooth motion
- Place pillow behind one shoulder
- Raise that arm behind the head
- Examine outer breast and underarm area (1 o’clock to 5 o’clock) with opposite hand
- use CIRCULAR, CLOCKWISE pattern
- repeat for other breast
- remove pillow, check inner breast (6 o’clock to 11 o’clock)
- repeat for other breast

Did you know?

- 1) 80% of breast cancers diagnosed clinically are found by the woman herself.
- 2) Over the past 70 years there have only been sporadic cases of breast cancer in females under the age of 20 yrs.
- 3) Less than 1% of all breast tumors in adolescents are cancerous.
- 4) 98% of breast cancer occurs in women older than 25 yrs.
- 5) “The only thing worse than knowing, is not knowing.”

Taken from:

^ “Breast self-examination” pamphlet written by the Canadian Cancer Society & “Adolescent Health Care: A Practical Guide”, Neinstein, N. 1991.

^^ “Women’s Health Matters”, Marvelon - Breast Self-Examination, reviewed by A> Fyles MD, FRCPC Breast Site Group, Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call Health Services at Mount Allison University to see the Nurse/Educator at 364-2163 or book an appointment to see your physician.