

## How to Perform a Breast Self-Examination

### How to Do a Breast-Self-Examination Properly

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There are many good reasons for doing a breast self-examination (BSE) every month. It's easy to do, and the more you do it, the better you get at it. Many suspicious breast lumps are found by women performing these self-exams. When you know how your breast normally feels, you will be able to feel any changes.

The best time to examine your breasts is right after your period, when they are not tender or swollen. If you do not have regular periods or sometimes skip a month, do it on the same day of every month.

In six easy steps, here's how to do a BSE:

1. Lie down and put a pillow under your right shoulder. Place your right arm behind your head.
2. Use the finger pads of your three middle fingers on your left hand to feel for lumps or thickening in your right breast. Your finger pads are the top third of each finger.
3. Press firmly enough to know how your breast feels. If you're not sure how hard to press, ask your health care provider. Or try to copy the way your health care provider uses the finger pads during a breast exam. Learn what your breast feels like most of the time. A firm ridge in the lower curve of each breast is normal.
4. Move around the breast in a set way. You can choose either the circle (A), the up and down (B), or the wedge (C). Do it the same way each month. It will help you to make sure that you've gone over the entire breast area, and to remember how your breast feels.
5. Now examine your left breast using the right hand finger pads.
6. Repeat the examination of both breasts while standing, with one arm behind your head. The upright position makes it easier to check the upper and outer parts of the breasts (toward your armpit). You may want to do the standing part of the BSE while you are in the shower. Some breast changes can be felt more easily when your skin is wet and soapy.



For added safety, you can also check your breasts for any dimpling of the skin, changes in the nipple, redness, or swelling while standing in front of a mirror right after your BSE each month.

It's important for women to remember that BSE is not the only test for early detection of breast cancer. Mammography and clinical breast examination by a health professional are more sensitive than BSE for finding small cancers. That is why the ACS recommends a combination of mammography, clinical breast exam (CBE), and breast self-exam as outlined below:

- Women 40 and older should have an annual mammogram, annual CBE by a health professional, and should perform monthly BSE. The CBE should be done close to the scheduled mammogram.
- Women 20 to 39 should have a CBE every three years and should perform monthly BSE.