

Breast self-examination (BSE)

All women are at risk of developing breast cancer – this risk increases with age and/or if you have a family history of breast cancer. Regular screening and performing regular breast self-examination (BSE) are important for early detection of breast cancer.

What is BSE and why should women do it?

BSE is a simple and effective way for women to recognize the very early signs and symptoms of breast cancer.

By performing BSE on a regular basis, you will get to know and familiarize yourself with the normal feel of your breasts so that any new sudden changes can be more readily picked up.

How often should I perform BSE?

BSE should be performed once a month. It is a simple procedure to undertake and should only take several minutes to perform.

The best time to do a BSE is about a week after your last menstrual period. Your breasts are less tender and lumpier.

How do I perform a BSE?

In the privacy of your bathroom, remove the upper part of your clothing and stand in front of a mirror so that you can see both breasts clearly.

[Looking]

- Place your hands on both hips, press firmly and lean slightly forward
- Look for any:
 - general changes in the contour, size and shape of both breasts.
 - recent asymmetry like swelling or shrinkage of the breast (especially if on one side only).
 - skin changes such as redness, tethering, puckering or dimpling of the skin.
 - changes in the nipples – eg inward or inverted nipple or if the skin of the nipple and surrounding area (the areola) looks scaly, red and swollen. Squeeze both nipples to check for any abnormal discharge especially bloody stained nipple discharge.
- Look again for all these changes with your arms raised above your head.

[Feeling]

- Standing, with your right hand behind your head, use your left hand to check your right breast.
- Use the pads of your fingers to apply gentle pressure to the right breast.
- Start at the upper outer quadrant of the right breast and feel in small circular motions – ensure you cover the whole breast.
- Note for any changes in texture, warmth or pain in the breast or a mass that is painless, hard or with an irregular edge.
- Switch sides and repeat the above process on your left breast.
- You can repeat the process lying down. Also check your underarm areas for any enlarged lymph nodes.



What should I do if I find a lump?

Do not panic! Just because you find a lump or noticed a change in your breasts does not mean you have breast cancer. There could be many benign (non-cancerous) causes. If you have any concerns, do book an appointment to see your own doctor for a more detailed breast examination and further testing should this be required.

If your monthly BSE remains normal, remember to have an annual clinical breast examination (CBE) done by your doctor. After a certain age, your doctor will advise you to return at regular intervals for a CBE as well as mammogram and/breast ultrasound scan screening.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding BSE or any new changes noted in your breasts, please consult your doctor for further advice.