

FEEL YOUR BOOBIES

How to screen yourself for Breast Cancer

Managing your risk for breast cancer involves being aware of the signs and symptoms and monitoring changes in your body. When breast cancer is detected early you have a **greater chance** of being treated successfully. One way to do this is to regularly perform a **breast self-examination**.



What is Breast Self-examination

Breast self-examination is a procedure a woman can do to **physically and visually** examine her breasts and underarm areas for changes.

A breast self-examination should be done in addition to a clinical breast examination performed by a health care provider for women in their 20s and 30s and women aged 40 and should also have a mammogram.

The Australian government has a **national screening program**, **BreastScreen Australia**, which provides free mammograms every two years to women aged 40 and over.

If you have any questions or concerns
always contact your GP.

If you're still concerned about a persistent
symptoms **get a second opinion.**

Trust your instincts.

No one knows your body like you do.

Changes to Look For

Knowing the symptoms of breast cancer and doing regular self-examinations to determine what is your normal so you can identify any changes is **critical to managing your breast health**. If you notice any of these symptoms that persist or worsen for **two-three weeks**, or find a change in your breast that is unusual for you, **see your doctor without delay:**

- Swelling or thickening
- Soreness or rash (irritation)
- Warmth, redness or darkening
- Change in size or shape
- Dimpling or puckering of skin
- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on nipple
- Nipple that becomes flat or inverted
- Nipple discharge
- New, persistent pain in one spot (breast or nipple)
- Persistent itching
- Bumps that resemble bug bites
- A lump, in your breast or underarm (armpit)

When To Feel Boobies

By doing breast self-examinations regularly, you get to know how your breasts normally feel and look so that you are able to **detect any changes more easily**.

Women can begin practicing breast self-examinations at about age 20 and continue the practice throughout their lives even during pregnancy and after menopause.

Breast self-examination **can be performed every month**. **Become familiar with how your breasts**, usually look and feel so that you may notice any change from what is normal for you:

- If you still menstruate, **the best time** to do a breast self-examination is when your breasts are least likely to be tender or swollen, such as a few days after your period ends.
- If you no longer menstruate, pick a certain day, such as the first day of each month, to remind yourself to do a breast self-examination.
- If you are taking hormones, talk with your health care provider about when to do a breast self-examination.



Breast Self-Examination Tips and Techniques

There is no right or wrong way to check your breasts for any changes. What is important is **becoming familiar with the normal look and feel of your breasts** by looking at and feeling them regularly to making sure your breasts are their usual size, shape and colour so as to be able to identify changes. Below are some tips and techniques for performing a self breast examination.

Performing A Breast Self-examination

- 1 Stand in front of a mirror that is large enough for you to see your breasts clearly. Check each breast for anything unusual. Check the skin for puckering, dimpling, or scaliness. Look for a discharge from the nipples.
- 2 Watching closely in the mirror, clasp your hands behind your head and press your hands forward.
- 3 Next, press your hands firmly on your hips and bend slightly toward the mirror as you pull your shoulders and elbows forward.
Do steps 2 and 3 to check for any change in the shape or contour of your breasts. As you do these steps, you should feel your chest muscles tighten.
- 4 Gently squeeze each nipple and look for a discharge.
- 5 The breasts are best examined while lying down because it spreads the breast tissue evenly over the chest. Lie flat on your back, with one arm over your head and a pillow or folded towel under the shoulder. This position flattens the breast and makes it easier to check.

Use the pads of the fingers of your other hand to check the breast and the surrounding area **firmly, carefully, and thoroughly**. Some women like to use lotion or powder to help their fingers glide easily over the skin. Feel for any unusual lump or mass under the skin. Feel the tissue by pressing your fingers in small, overlapping areas about the size of a dime. To be sure you cover the whole breast, take your time and follow a definite pattern: lines, circles, or wedges.

Some research suggests that many women do a breast self-examination more thoroughly when they use a pattern of **up-and-down lines or strips**. Other women feel more comfortable with other patterns. The important thing is to **cover the whole breast and pay special attention to the area between the breast and the underarm, including the underarm itself**. Check the area above the breast, up to the collarbone, and all the way over to your shoulder. Consider using one of these patterns:

Lines



Start in the underarm area and move your fingers downward little by little until they are below the breast. Then move your fingers slightly toward the middle and slowly move back up. Go up and down until you cover the whole area.

Circles



Beginning at the outer edge of your breast, move your fingers slowly around the whole breast in a circle. Move around the breast in smaller and smaller circles, gradually working toward the nipple. Don't forget to check the underarm and upper chest areas too.

Wedges



Starting at the outer edge of the breast, move your fingers toward the nipple and back to the edge. Check your whole breast, covering one small, wedge-shaped section at a time. Be sure to check the underarm area and the upper chest.

- 6 Some women repeat step 5 in the shower. Your fingers will glide easily over soapy skin, so you can focus on feeling for changes underneath.

What if you Find a Change?

One of the most important reasons to do regular breast self-examination is so that you know what is normal for your breasts. If you see or feel something different or unusual while performing a breast self-examination see your GP without delay.