

The American Cancer Society recommends that women begin performing a monthly breast self-exam (BSE) at age 20. A review of the 5-step BSE is shown below.

Step 1: Look with arms on hips

Begin by looking at your breast(s) in the mirror with your shoulders straight and your arms on your hips. Check for healthy breasts that are:

- Their usual size, shape and color.
- Evenly shaped without visible distortion or swelling.

Notify your doctor if you see any of the following:

- Dimpling, puckering or bulging of the skin.
- Nipple position change or shift from pointing out to pointing in.
- Redness, soreness, rash or swelling.



Step 2: Look with arms above head

Now, raise your arms and look for the same changes.

Step 3: Check for nipple discharge

While you are at the mirror, gently squeeze each nipple between your finger and thumb and check for nipple discharge. Nipple discharge (other than milk) is typically associated with non-cancerous conditions, but do alert your doctor to the presence and type of nipple discharge.



Step 4: Lie down to examine your breasts

Now feel your breasts while lying down, using your right hand to feel your left breast and your left hand to feel your right breast. Use a firm, smooth touch with the first few fingers of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together. Cover the entire breast from top to bottom (from your collarbone to the top of your abdomen) and side to side (from your armpit to your cleavage). Follow a pattern to be sure that you cover the whole breast. You can begin at the nipple, moving in larger and larger circles until you reach the outer edge of the breast. You can also move your fingers up and down vertically, in rows, as if you were mowing a lawn. Begin examining each area with a very soft touch, and then increase pressure so that you can feel the deeper tissue.



Step 5: Stand or sit to examine your breasts

Finally, feel your breasts while you are standing or sitting. You may find that this is easier to do in the shower when your skin is wet and slippery. Check you entire breast, using the same hand movements described in Step 4.

Monthly breast self-exams are not a substitute for yearly breast exams by a health care provider or for yearly mammograms beginning at age 40.


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