

# Breast self-examination

Over the course of a lifetime, a woman's risk of getting breast cancer is one in eight. The sooner the breast cancer is detected, the greater the chance for successful treatment. Breast self-examination is a very simple, significant and effective method of early detection for breast cancer.

## RISKS

- Having had cancer in one breast.
- A family history of breast cancer, especially for the mother, daughters and sisters of the woman with breast cancer. The risk of contracting cancer being 2 to 3 times higher after the age of 30.
- Women above 30 years who have never given birth.
- Women with early onset of menstruation (before age 12) or late menopause (after age 55)

## SELF MANAGEMENT

### WHEN TO DO BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION?

- ❖ Regular monthly breast self-examination.
- ❖ The time is 7-10 days from the expected start of the next period.
- ❖ When not menstruating, examine yourself on the first day of each month and mark it on the calendar to aid your memory.

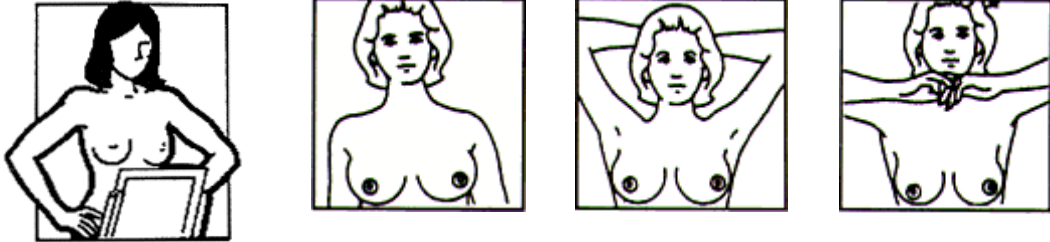
### HOW TO DO IT?

#### DURING SHOWER

Raise one arm; with your finger flat move gently over every part of each breast. Use your right hand to examine the left breast, and your left hand to examine the right breast. Check for any thickening, hard lump on the breast.



## IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR



- With arms by the sides, arms raised above your head, turning slowly from side to side
- With hands on hip, press firmly down to tense the chest muscle and thrust the breast forward

Look carefully for changes in size, shape and contour of each breast. Look for puckering, dimpling or withdrawal of the nipple.

- Gently squeeze both nipples and look for discharge. Check the discharge, is it clear or blood stained.

## LYING DOWN

TO EXAMINE THE RIGHT BREAST, A PILLOW SHOULD BE PUT UNDER RIGHT SHOULDER AND PLACE YOUR RIGHT HAND BEHIND THE HEAD. FINGERS FLAT, PRESS GENTLY IN SMALL CIRCLES, STARTING AT THE OUTERMOST TOP EDGE OF THE BREAST. AFTER FINISHING ONE CIRCLE, MOVE IN ONE INCH (2.5 CM) TOWARDS THE NIPPLE, KEEP CIRCLING TO EXAMINE EVERY PART OF THE BREAST, INCLUDING THE NIPPLE. REPEAT THE SAME PROCEDURE ON THE LEFT BREAST WITH A PILLOW UNDER THE LEFT SHOULDER AND PLACE THE LEFT HAND BEHIND THE HEAD. FEEL FOR LUMPS UNDER AND ALONG THE TOP OF THE COLLARBONE TOO.



**circular motion**

**Fingers flat**

**press gently in small circle**



**Feel for lumps under and along the top of collarbone**

## IMPORTANT

Please seek advice from the doctor if there is:

- ✓ Any lump
- ✓ Any change in an existing lump
- ✓ Any change in skin texture, dimpling, swelling or puckering of the skin.
- ✓ Withdrawal of nipple.
- ✓ Pain on the breast.

## NEW HABITS

- 📄 Practice breast self-examination as recommended. Get to know your own breast, self-examination is not just to find lumps but also to notice if there are any changes.
- 📄 Have a low fat diet
- 📄 Exercise regularly
- 📄 Limit intake of salt-cured, smoked food and food preserved with nitrites and nitrates.
- 📄 Go for a mammogram every year or at least once every 2 years from age 50 onwards. This is especially for those at higher risks.
- 📄 Breast-feed your baby. This may reduce your risk of breast cancer especially before menopause.
- 📄 See physician if you notice any change in your breast.

## RESIST

- ❑ Worrying about a breast lump or other abnormal changes. Usually only 1 in 10 breast lumps are cancerous.
- ❑ Being embarrassed about having your breast examined by the physician.
- ❑ Becoming overweight
- ❑ Exposure to radiation. Wear a lead apron when you have dental X rays taken.

## ENJOY

**Healthy life**  
**without the fear of getting breast cancer.**

**Practice:** Breast Self Examination as Recommended

### REFERENCES:

1. Self care pharmacy health information
2. The Merck Manual 17<sup>th</sup> Edition 1999, p1974-1982
3. Information from American Cancer Society

### Website:

- a) <http://www.cancer.org/>

---

Self Care Guide, Pharmaceutical Services Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia  
[http://www.pharmacy.gov.my/self\\_care\\_guide](http://www.pharmacy.gov.my/self_care_guide)  
[\[ Disclaimer \]](#) [\[ Acknowledgement \]](#)