

How to Conduct a Breast Self-Exam (BSE)

A BSE provides an opportunity to detect tumors that may develop between yearly clinical breast exams. To increase the chance of detecting a small tumor at a time when it may be more responsive to treatment, a BSE should be performed monthly, usually 2-3 days after menstruation. For women with irregular periods, the monthly BSE should be performed on the same day each month. Keep in mind that prior to menstruation or during pregnancy, breasts may be somewhat lumpy or more tender than usual.

1. Lie down. Flatten your right breast by placing a pillow or towel under your right shoulder. Place your right arm behind your head. Examine your right breast with your left hand.
2. Use the pads, not the tips, of the middle three fingers on your left hand. With fingers flat, press gently using a circular, rubbing motion and feel for lumps. In small, dime-sized circles without lifting the fingers, start at the outermost top edge of your breast and spiral in toward the nipple.
3. Press firmly enough to feel the different breast tissues, using three different pressures. First, light pressure to just move the skin without jostling the tissue beneath, then medium pressure pressing midway into the tissue, and finally deep pressure to probe more deeply down to the ribs or to the point just short of discomfort.
4. Completely feel all of the breast and chest area up under your armpit, up to the collarbone, and all the way over to your shoulder to cover breast tissue that extends toward the shoulder.
5. Gently squeeze both nipples and look for discharge.

After completely examining your right breast, examine your left breast using the same method with your right hand. You may want to examine your breasts or do an extra exam while showering because it's easy to slide soapy hands over your skin and to feel anything unusual. You should also check your breasts in a mirror, looking for any change in size or contour, dimpling of the skin, or spontaneous nipple discharge.

Adapted from Life Extension® (www.lef.org)