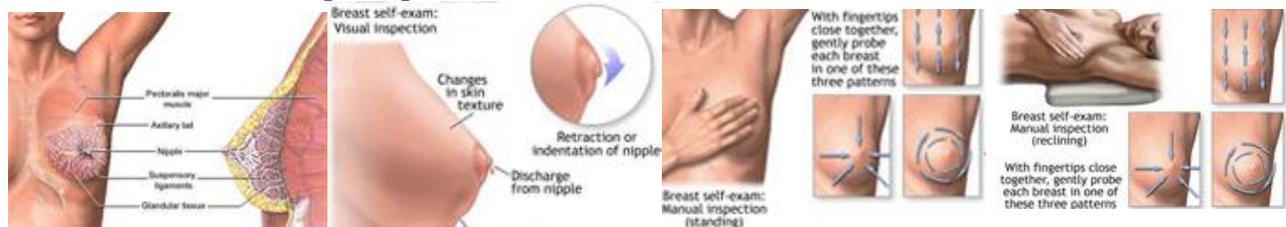


Self Examination

When breast cancer is detected early treatment is easier and more successful. For that reason, some experts recommend that women over 20 perform a monthly breast self-exam to look for new lumps and other changes. The self-exam does have limitations, however, and is not a substitute for regular breast examinations from your doctor and screening mammograms. If you do perform monthly exams, it's best to do them 3-5 days after your period ends, when your breasts are the least tender and lumpy.

Scroll down to view the images larger.



First, lie on your back. Place your right hand behind your head. With the middle fingers of your left hand, gently yet firmly press down using small motions to examine the entire right breast. Then, while sitting or standing, examine your armpit, an important area that is commonly overlooked. Breast tissue extends to this area, so it is important that it be included in every breast exam. Gently squeeze the nipple, checking for discharge. Repeat the process on the left breast.

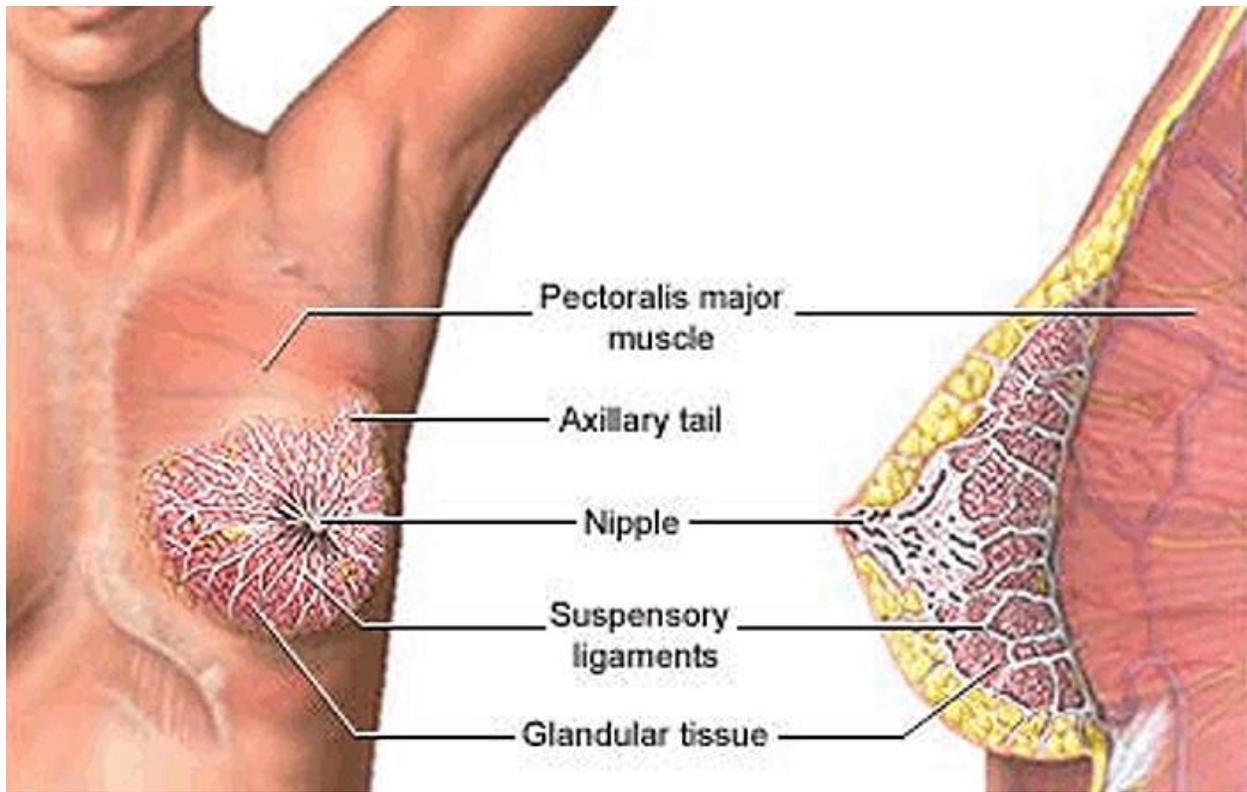
Although some women find it easiest to do the exam in the shower when the skin is soft and wet, you are more likely to examine all of the breast tissue if you are lying down. Next, stand in front of a mirror with your arms by your side. Look at your breasts directly, as well as in the mirror. Search for changes in skin texture, such as dimpling, puckering, indentations, and skin with an "orange peel-like texture". Look for changes in shape, contour, and inversion of the nipples. Finally, perform the exam again, this time with your arms raised above your head.

Immediately discuss any changes you find with your doctor. Most women have some naturally occurring lumps in their breasts, but it's important that you become familiar with the way your breasts normally feel, so you can be aware of any new changes. Though the American Cancer Society considers self-examinations to be optional, it's a good idea to talk to your health care provider about what is right for you.

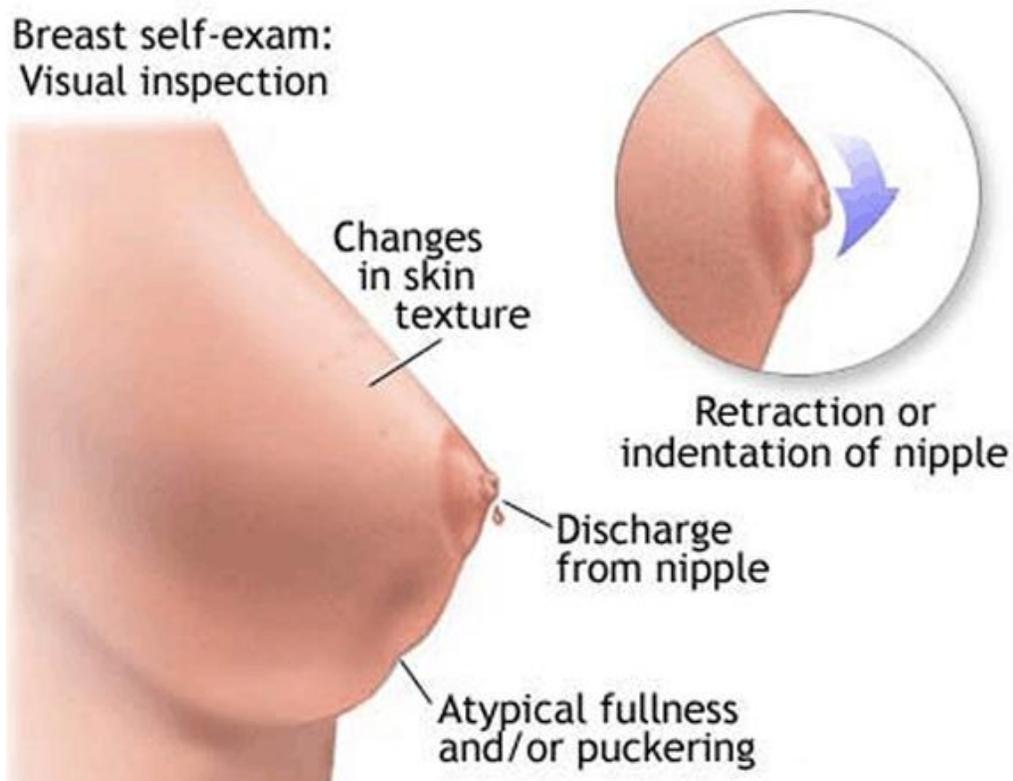
References:

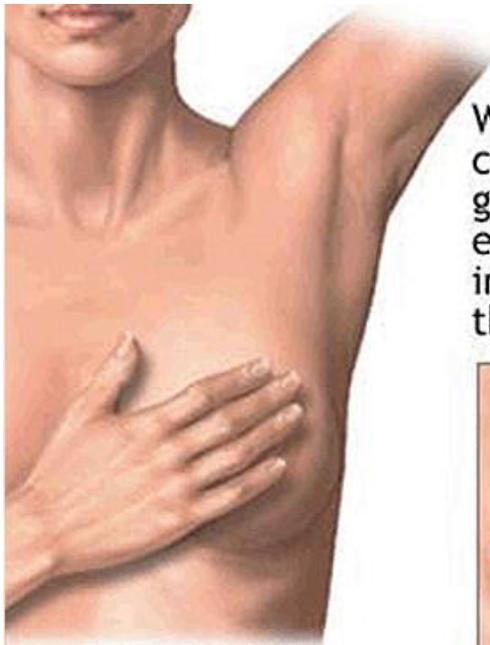
US Preventive Services Task Force, Screening for Breast Cancer Recommendations and Rationale Guide to Clinical Preventive Services: Third Edition (2000-2003).

Rockville, Maryland US Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Agency for Health Care Policy and Research; 2002.



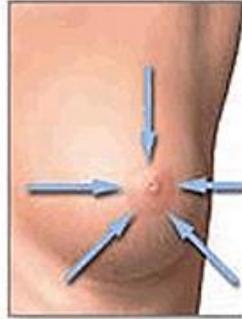
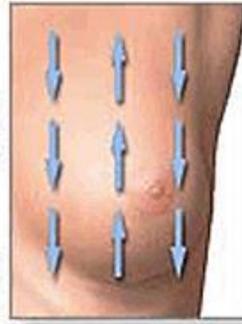
Breast self-exam:
Visual inspection





Breast self-exam:
Manual inspection
(standing)

With fingertips close together, gently probe each breast in one of these three patterns



Breast self-exam:
Manual inspection
(reclining)

With fingertips close together, gently probe each breast in one of these three patterns

