

Taking Care of Your Breast Health



Barbara (Bobbi) P. Clarke, PhD, RD, Professor, Community Health Education

Laura L. Jones, MS, Extension Assistant, Community Health Education

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✿ A *self breast exam* is an optional test for you to periodically examine your breasts both visually and by feeling each breast. Doing so can help you to be aware of what your breasts normally look and feel like so that you will know if changes occur.

✿ A *mammogram* is an X-ray picture of the breast tissue that can identify lumps years before they can be felt and can also detect areas of breast tissue that appear to be changing in ways that could lead to cancer. Yearly mammograms are recommended for women over 40 (sometimes earlier depending on your breast cancer risk).

What can I do to stay healthy and lower my risk of breast cancer?

Not all women who get breast cancer had identifiable risk factors, and some women who have several risk factors will not get breast cancer. However, the following are some manageable behaviors that are believed to help lower breast cancer risk:

- ✿ Maintain a healthy weight.
- ✿ Limit/avoid alcohol.
- ✿ Exercise regularly.
- ✿ Limit fat intake.
- ✿ Don't smoke (or try to quit if you do).
- ✿ Look for ways to reduce stress in your life.

Is there any help for people who need screenings?

If you do not have insurance (or your insurance does not cover mammograms) and you meet age and income guidelines, the Tennessee Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program may be able to help you. For more information, see the program website at <http://health.state.tn.us/BCC>. The local affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure may also have additional assistance suggestions for your area.

For more information on breast health, see the following websites:

[Susan G. Komen for the Cure](http://www.komen.org)

www.komen.org

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/publications.htm)
(breast health publications)

www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/publications.htm

[TEAM UP Tennessee website](http://teamup.tennessee.edu)

(University of Tennessee Extension)

<http://teamup.tennessee.edu>

For more information on women's health, contact:



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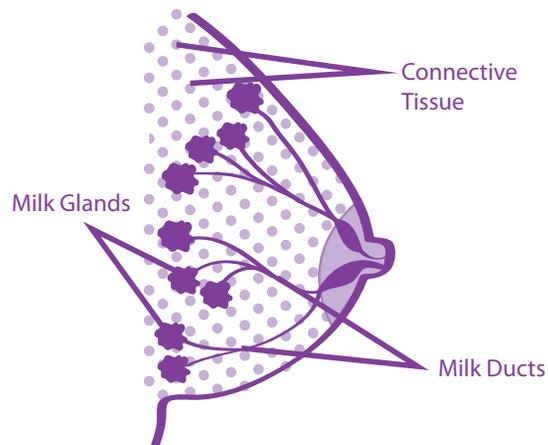
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WHEN YOU THINK OF TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AND STAYING HEALTHY, BREAST HEALTH IS PROBABLY NOT SOMETHING THAT USUALLY COMES TO MIND. HOWEVER, THERE ARE STEPS THAT YOU CAN TAKE TO HELP PREVENT AND AVOID BREAST PROBLEMS.

What are the parts that make up the breast?

The main function of the breast is to produce milk. Breasts are made up of fat tissue, milk-producing lobes and ducts that carry the milk from the lobes to the nipple. Breasts also contain connective tissue for structure and lymph nodes, which are part of a drainage system that exists throughout the whole body. Women typically have between 15 and 25 lobes that are arranged around the nipple like spokes of a wheel. Each nipple contains six to 10 ductal openings through which milk can flow.



Breast Development

Breast development occurs in stages over the course of a female's life.

- ✦ At *puberty*, estrogen (a hormone) causes the breasts to grow and the lobes and ducts to branch out and increase in size. However, the lobes do not reach full maturity at this time.
- ✦ The rise in estrogen and progesterone (a hormone) during *pregnancy* cause the lobes and ducts to grow further and mature for milk production.
- ✦ During a normal *menstrual cycle*, hormonal changes induce some growth in the milk glands in preparation for a possible pregnancy. When pregnancy does not occur, they return to normal size. Water retention during the menstrual cycle can cause an increase in the size of the breasts.
- ✦ After *menopause*, the breasts become less dense and the amount of fat tissue increases. The number and size of remaining lobes also decrease.

What is a “normal” breast supposed to feel like?

The texture of breast tissue varies from person to person, but most women report that their breasts normally feel slightly lumpy. Breast size and texture can vary even in the same person based on weight changes, medication use, breastfeeding and age. Breast texture in premenopausal women varies over the course of the menstrual cycle with breasts feeling most lumpy just before a period. For this reason, it is best to check breasts for abnormalities after a period.

How can I tell if something is wrong with my breast(s)?

The following are symptoms that may alert you to a potential problem if the symptom is different from what you usually notice about your breast:

- ✦ Lump or thickening of breast tissue
- ✦ Change in the size or shape of the breast
- ✦ Skin surface puckering or dimpling

- ✦ Pain that does not go away
- ✦ Redness, swelling or flaking anywhere on the breast
- ✦ Discharge from the nipple
- ✦ A nipple that is tender or turns inward (“inverted nipple”)

What if I find a lump?

Most breast lumps (8 out of 10) are due to conditions other than cancer. Breast tissue undergoes changes during your menstrual cycle and over the course of your life. During periods of growth, breast cells divide and grow in abnormal ways. These cell changes can lead to a mass of cells called a tumor. Some tumors are cancer (malignant), but other tumors are just an accumulation of cells (benign). Some other common conditions that can cause breast lumps include:

- ✦ *Cysts* — Fluid-filled sacs that form in the breast. Cysts can be drained if they become too large or uncomfortable.
- ✦ *Fibrocystic breast disorder* — A cluster of several symptoms that many women experience over the course of the menstrual cycle that can result in increased breast lumpiness, tenderness and soreness.

Finding Problems Early

The earlier breast problems are found, the greater the options for treatment and the better the anticipated outcome. Every woman should stay current with recommended breast screening measures so that any problems can be found early and treated immediately. As recommended by the American Cancer Society the following are tools that can be used to find problems:

- ✦ A *clinical breast exam* is performed by your physician and involves a thorough examination of the breasts and tissue up into the underarm for any abnormalities that can be seen or felt. This test should be performed at least every three years starting at age 20 and annually after age 40.