

Breast Health: Breast Self-Awareness



What is breast self-awareness?

Breast self-awareness is knowing how your breasts normally look and feel. Your breasts change as you go through different stages of your life. So it's important to learn what is normal for your breasts. Knowing about your breasts helps you spot any changes in them right away. Tell your healthcare provider about any changes.

Why is breast self-awareness important?

Many experts now say that women should focus on breast self-awareness instead of doing a breast self-exam (BSE). These experts include the American Cancer Society and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Some experts even advise not teaching women to do a BSE. That's because research hasn't shown that doing BSEs helps.

Breast self-awareness is different than a BSE. It isn't about following a certain method and schedule. It's about knowing what's normal for your breasts. That way you can spot even small changes right away. If you see any changes, tell your healthcare provider.

Changes to look for

Call your healthcare provider if you find any changes in your breasts that worry you. These changes may be:

- A lump
- Nipple discharge other than breastmilk, especially if it's bloody
- Swelling
- A change in size or shape
- Skin changes, such as redness, thickening, or dimpling of the skin
- Swollen lymph nodes in the armpit
- Nipple problems, such as pain or redness

If you find a lump

Call your healthcare provider if you find lumpiness in one breast. Also call if you feel something different in the tissue or feel a definite lump. Sometimes lumpiness may be due to menstrual changes. But there may be reason for concern.

Your healthcare provider may want to see you right away if you have:

- Nipple discharge that is bloody
- Skin changes on your breast, such as dimpling or puckering

It's OK to be upset if you find a lump. Be sure to call your healthcare provider right away. Remember that most breast lumps are benign. This means they are not cancer.

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