

Doctor's Bag



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KNOWN RISK FACTORS FOR BREAST CANCER

There are some risk factors for breast cancer – age, family history, age at first menstrual period, age at first full-term pregnancy, late menopause and natural breast density – that you cannot change. However, other factors, including those listed below, may be well within your control.

- Obesity
- Physical Activity
- Alcohol Consumption
- Tobacco Use
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

A woman's best overall preventive health strategy is to reduce the known risk factors as much as possible. Unhealthy diet, excess body weight, physical inactivity, tobacco use and alcohol consumption are well-documented modifiable risk factors for breast and other forms of cancer.

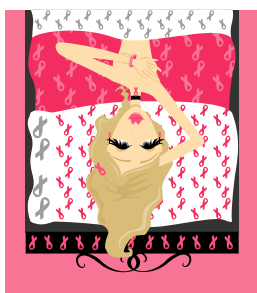
For some women, HRT may increase the risk of late-stage diagnoses of breast cancer. This is because HRT may increase breast density, making mammograms less effective for early detection. A woman considering HRT should discuss risks and benefits, as well as alternative treatment options, with her doctor.

If you have any questions about breast cancer, mammography or breast exams, please ask your personal doctor for guidance.

HLInfo YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

The Importance of Breast Self-Exams

Breast self-exams play an important role in breast cancer detection. Routine mammograms and clinical exams are considered the most effective methods of early detection. However, monthly self-exams can reveal changes in the way your breasts look and feel. While such changes do not always indicate the onset of breast cancer, it is important to report them to a health professional as soon as you notice them.



How to Examine Your Breasts

The American Cancer Society recommends the following procedure for breast self-examination:

- Lie down and place your right arm behind your head. The exam is done while lying down, not standing up. This is because the breast tissue is able to spread evenly over the chest wall and is as thin as possible, making it much easier to feel all the breast tissue.
- Use the finger pads of the three middle fingers on your left hand to feel for lumps in the right breast. Use overlapping dime-sized circular motions of the finger pads to feel the breast tissue.
- Use three different levels of pressure to feel all the breast tissue. Light pressure is needed to feel the tissue closest to the skin; medium pressure to feel a little deeper; and firm pressure to feel the tissue closest to the chest and ribs. If you're not sure how hard to press, ask your doctor.
- Move around the breast in an up-and-down pattern starting at an imaginary line drawn straight down your side from the underarm and moving across the breast to the middle of the chest bone (sternum or breastbone). Be sure to check the entire breast area going down until you feel only the ribs and up to the neck or collar bone (clavicle).
- Repeat the exam on your left breast, using the finger pads of the right hand.
- While standing in front of a mirror with your hands pressing firmly down on your hips, look at your breasts for any changes of size, shape, contour, dimpling, or redness/scaliness of the nipple and breast skin. (Pressing down on the hips contracts the chest wall muscles and enhances any breast changes.)
- Examine each underarm while sitting up or standing and with your arm only slightly raised so you can easily feel in this area. Raising your arm straight up tightens the tissue in this area and makes it harder to examine.

Age 40 and Older

- Annual mammogram
- Annual clinical breast examination
- Monthly breast self-examination (optional)

Age 20-39

- Clinical breast examination at least every three years
- Monthly breast self-examination (optional)

American Cancer Society Guidelines for Breast Cancer Detection in Average-Risk Women

Newsletter information sources: American Cancer Society, "How to Perform a Breast Self-Exam," Updated 09/04/2008; American Cancer Society, "Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2007-2008," Atlanta: American Cancer Society, Inc.

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