Take Charge of Breast Health

Perform breast self-exams for early cancer detection

According to the Mayo Clinic, breast self-exams (BSEs) are extremely useful measures in helping women become familiar with the look and feel of their breasts while they are healthy. In doing regular exams, women can determine if there are changes in their breast tissue, thus indicating breast cancer or other potentially harmful conditions.

Conducting a Self-Exam
The American Cancer Society recommends the following technique for conducting a BSE:

- Lie down and place one arm behind your head.
- Use the pads of your middle three fingers on the opposite hand (left hand for right breast and right hand for left breast) to check your breast tissue. Use an up-and-down pattern from your underarm to your collarbone to feel for changes.
- Look in a mirror for changes to size, shape or coloring of your breasts.

Breast Tissue Changes
Contact your doctor if you notice any of the following changes to your breast tissue while doing a self-exam:

- Lumps that differ from normal breast tissue
- Dimpling skin
- Red or scaly skin
- Nipple discharge or pain

It is normal for breast tissue to change during menstrual cycles, pregnancy, menopause, or while taking birth control pills or other hormone therapy. However, if you notice changes at other times in your life, it is strongly suggested that you visit a doctor immediately.

For more in-depth assistance on how to perform a BSE, visit [ww5.komen.org](http://ww5.komen.org). This site provides a Breast Self-Awareness Interactive Tool that you can view. You can also view a color diagram on [www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org) to help you perform a thorough self-exam.

Did you know...?
Don’t forget your annual gynecological visit! When visiting your physician for your annual Pap smear and pelvic exam, your doctor will also conduct a breast exam to look and feel for changes to your breast tissue. This is a critical part of your disease prevention care.