

What You Should Know About Breast Cancer Screening

Screening for breast cancer means checking breast tissue before there are symptoms of cancer. All women should be screened, even if you don't think anything is wrong. These tests can save your life because if found early, breast cancer can be treated.

What Kinds of Tests Are There?

There are many kinds of breast cancer screening tests. The 3 main types are: **breast self-exams**, **clinical exams**, and **mammograms**. You can do the self-exam at home but will need to go to a doctor for the clinical exam and mammogram. None of these tests prevent or cure breast cancer. They can help detect it early, though, especially mammograms. If your health care professional suggests a breast cancer screening test, it does not mean he or she thinks you have cancer.



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Breast Self-Exams

You do this test yourself. Do it once a month right after your period. If you don't get your period (are menopausal), try to do the exam on the same day each month. During a breast self-exam, *look* and *feel* for changes in your breasts. If you see or feel a change, have your doctor check it out.

When looking for changes in your breasts, start by sitting or standing in front of a mirror. Put your hands on your hips. Look for dimpling,

puckering, or redness on your breasts. Is there discharge from the nipples or a change in breast size or shape? Then put your hands behind your head and look for the same changes.

To feel for changes in your breasts, lie flat on your back. Put your left hand under your head. Use your right

hand to gently feel your left breast. Keep your fingers flat and together. Try to feel if there are any lumps or if something isn't normal. Also check your nipples to see if there is any discharge. Make sure you feel your upper chest area and below your armpits, too. Then put your right hand under your head and use your left hand to check your right breast.

All women should do breast self-exams, even if they are menopausal, pregnant, breastfeeding, or have breast implants.

Clinical Breast Exams

This test is like the breast self-exam, except your doctor does it as part of your regular physical exam. Women in their 20s and 30s should have it done every 3 years. After age 40, it should be done yearly.

Mammograms

A mammogram is an x-ray of your breasts taken by a machine that puts pressure on each breast. The x-ray is read by a clinician who can tell if anything is wrong. Mammograms can find growths that are too small to feel, and are the best method for detecting breast cancer early.

Since breast cancer develops most often in older women, you should get a mammogram every year once you turn 40. You may need to get them at a younger age if women in your family (such as your mother, sister, or daughter) have or have had breast cancer.



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What Else Can I Do?

Ask your doctor about the risk factors for breast cancer. You can't change some risk factors (like family history), but you can do other things that might help. Losing weight, exercising more, and drinking less alcohol can help lower your breast cancer risk and keep you healthy.