

# Breast Self-Checks

## What is a breast self-check?

A breast self-examination (BSE), or breast self-check, is an inspection that you do on your own, using your eyes and hands to check your breasts for any lumps or other changes.

Breast self-checks are best used to make you more familiar with how your breasts look and feel.<sup>1</sup> Having an understanding of what your “normal” is can make it easier to recognize changes and report them to your doctor.<sup>2</sup>

## Why is it done?

## How to Complete a Self-Check: The Preparation



Be sure to remove **all clothing above your waist** before completing your self-check!

If you **menstruate**, pick a point in your cycle when your breasts are least swollen or tender - usually the week after your period ends.<sup>1</sup> If you **don't menstruate**, or if you **have irregular periods**, pick a day and set a reminder so you do your self-check at the same time each month.



Done both of these things? Great! Let's get started.

## Breast Self-Check: Part 1

### Use Your Eyes

#### Step A

Sit or stand in front of a mirror facing forward. If you can't see your breasts clearly due to vision impairments, ask a trusted friend or loved one to help you.



Examine your breasts in these three positions...

#### Step B



With your arms at your sides.



With your arms raised above your head and palms pressed together.

With your arms pressed firmly onto your hips.



### Things to watch for:

- ❖ Puckering or dimpling of the skin
- ❖ Unusual redness
- ❖ Changes in size, shape or symmetry
- ❖ Nipple(s) appearing turned in (inverted)
- ❖ Sticky or bloody nipple discharge

#### Step C

Finally, lift each breast to see if the ridges along the bottom have changed (i.e. become less symmetrical).



Moving onto the next portion now...almost done!

## Breast Self-Check: Part 2

### Use Your Hands

Choose between two starting positions:

#### Step A



Lying down to spread your breast tissue evenly.



In the shower with soapy hands to help your fingers glide across your skin.

*For bonus points, consider completing your check in both positions!*

#### Step B

Use your hand to examine your whole breast - from armpit to cleavage, and from collarbone to the start of your abdomen.

#### TIPS FOR PROPER FORM...



1. Use the pads of your three middle fingers (not the fingertips).

2. Move slowly in small, coin-sized circles to feel for changes.



3. Examine using three different pressure levels:
- Light pressure for tissue close to the surface of the skin
  - Medium pressure for tissue a bit deeper
  - Firm pressure for tissue just above your breastbone and ribs (you should be able to feel these bones with your fingers as you examine at this pressure level)

### Things to feel for:

- ❖ Lumps (may be painful or painless)
- ❖ Areas of unusual thickness
- ❖ Warmth, swelling or pain
- ❖ Itching
- ❖ Sores or rashes
- ❖ Scaliness on skin or nipples

#### Step C

Repeat this process on **each breast**, using one hand to inspect while the other arm is raised above your head. For example, you will inspect your left breast with your right hand.



That's it! Here's some more info on breast self-checks.

## When to Talk to Your Doctor

Once you're familiar with the look and feel of your breasts, consider booking an appointment with your doctor if you notice any of the changes listed above.<sup>2</sup> They may recommend further testing such as a clinical breast exam, a mammogram, and/or an ultrasound.<sup>1</sup>

## Important Considerations

Our breasts are unique to us, and what is unusual for one person may be normal for another. When in doubt about a lump or other discovery, **check your other breast**. If the same attribute exists in the same area on both breasts, that may well be normal for you.<sup>2</sup>

Another thing to remember is that most breast issues or changes are caused by something other than cancer.<sup>2</sup>

## Limitations of Breast Self-Checks

When considering incorporating self-checks into your monthly routine, be mindful that they can cause increased anxiety if any breast changes are discovered, and may lead to potentially unnecessary and invasive testing (eg. biopsies).<sup>2</sup>

Breast self-checks are primarily useful for increasing breast awareness, and should not be used as a replacement for other breast cancer screening techniques such as mammograms.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/breast-exam/about/pac-20393237>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/hw3791>