

# BHAWD

**BREAST**  
**SELF-EXAMINATION**

*A New Approach*

*Especially modified for  
women with physical or  
sensory limitations.*

Breast Health Access for  
Women with Disabilities



# BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION

## A NEW APPROACH

All women over 20 should practice regular monthly breast self-examination (BSE). Regular and complete BSE can help you find changes in your breasts that occur between clinical breast examinations by a health professional, or between mammograms.

Ask your health care provider to instruct you in breast self-examination. Even if you are unable to do some of the examination because of physical limitations, you should be encouraged to do as much as you can yourself, so that you are involved in your own breast health.

Women should examine their breasts when they are less tender, usually seven days after the start of the menstrual period. Women who have entered menopause, who do not have regular periods, or who are pregnant or breast feeding, should continue to examine their breasts monthly, on the first of the month for example. Breast feeding mothers should examine their breasts when all milk has been expressed.

If a woman discovers a lump or detects any changes she should seek medical attention. Many changes are not a sign of breast cancer, but they should still be checked out. Seven out of eight women will not develop breast cancer, and 80% of lumps are not cancerous.

## HOW OFTEN?

### Guidelines for Breast Cancer Detection

Breast self-exam	
Age 20+ .....	Monthly
Clinical breast exam	
Age 20+ .....	Yearly
Mammography	
Age 40+ .....	Yearly

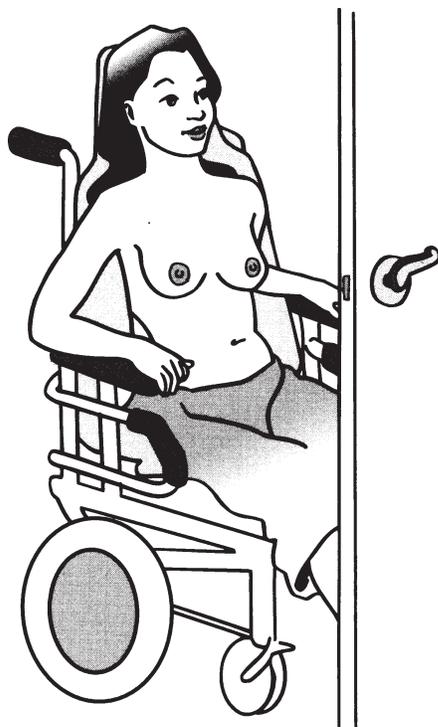
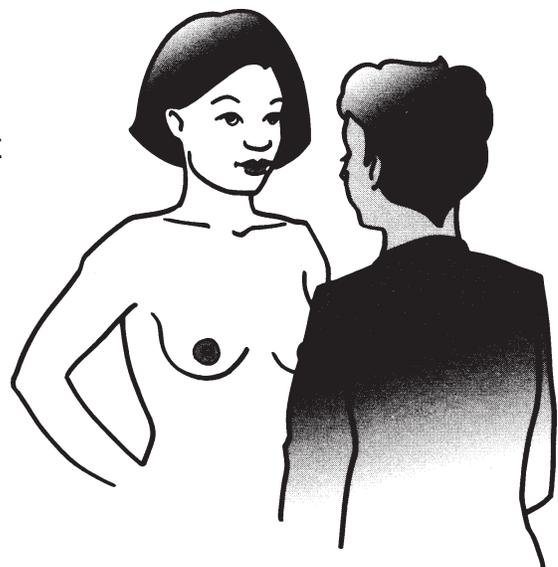
# 1. POSITIONS

*A Visual Inspection:* Standing or sitting in front of a mirror as illustrated.  
In each position look for

- ‡ Changes in color or shape of breast
- ‡ Changes in color or texture of the skin
- ‡ Changes in nipple shape or texture
- ‡ Evidence of nipple discharge
- ‡ Dimpling or puckering anywhere on chest

If your eyesight is limited, making it difficult for you to do the visual inspection yourself perhaps a close friend, spouse, an attendant or family member could help you with this.

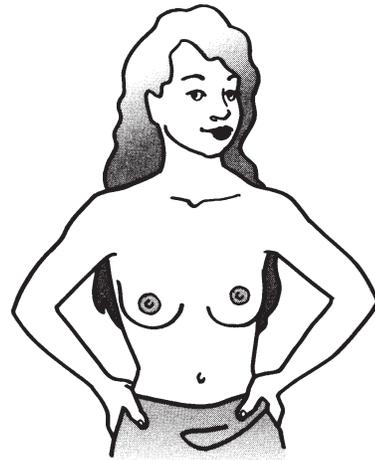
Ask your health care provider to instruct this person in the visual inspection.



If you cannot easily stand, you can do the visual inspection in a seated position, if you have a full length mirror, for example on the back of a door.



Arms relaxed at side



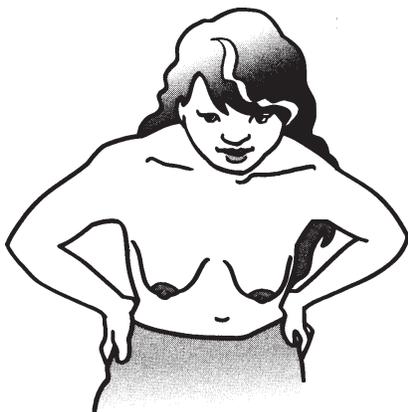
Hands on hips with your thumbs facing forward, push down on your hips



if you cannot place your hands on your hips, try clasping your hands together in front of you, to tighten your chest muscles



Arms raised above head



Bending forward

# POSITIONS FOR PALPATION

If you are able to use both your hands, use your left hand to palpate the right breast, while holding your right arm up with the elbow bent. Repeat the procedure on the other side. The side-lying position allows a woman, especially one with large breasts, to most effectively examine the outer half of the breast. A woman with small breasts may need only the flat position.

**Side-lying positions:** Lie on the opposite side of the breast to be examined. Place a pillow or rolled up towel under your shoulder blade. Rotate the shoulder back to the flat surface. Use the side-lying position to examine the outer half of your breast.



**Flat position:** Lie flat on your back with a pillow or folded towel under the shoulder of the breast to be examined.



Even if you need assistance to get into a lying position, this is better for breast examination than sitting in a chair or wheelchair, or while in the shower.

## 2. PERIMETER / AREA TO BE EXAMINED

The exam area is bounded by the line which extends down from the middle of the armpit to just beneath the breast, continues across the underside of the breast to the middle of the breast bone, then moves up and along the collar bone and back to the middle of the armpit. Most breast cancers occur in the upper outer area of the breast (the shaded area).



If you can use only one hand, use that for checking both breasts, and examine the breast on that side as well as you can.

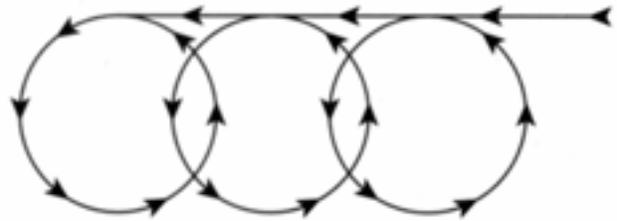


You may need help to check the outside part of the breast on the side of your “good” hand, especially if your breasts are large.

### 3. PALPATION WITH PADS OF FINGERS



Use the pads of three fingers to examine every inch of your breast tissue. Move your fingers in circles about the size of a dime.



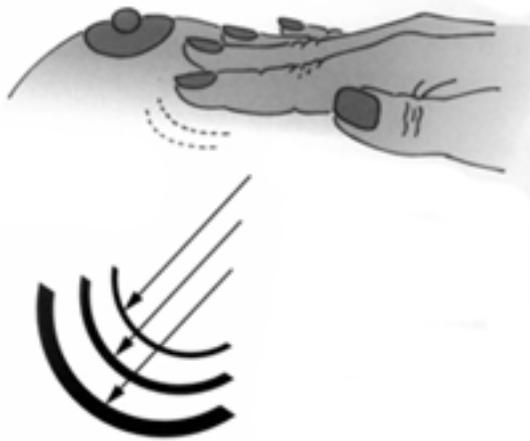
Do not lift your fingers from your breast between palpations. You can use powder or lotion to help your fingers glide from one spot to the next.



If you have difficulty using or feeling with the finger pads of one or both hands, try using the thumb, the palm of your hand or the back of your fingers.

If it is difficult to control one or both hands because of shaking movements, try using the other hand to stabilize the hand examining the breast.





## 4. PRESSURE

Use varying levels of pressure for each palpation, from light to deep, to examine the full thickness of your breast tissue. Using deep pressure will not injure the breast, but may normally cause some tenderness.

## 5. PATTERN OF SEARCH

### Vertical Strip

Use the following search pattern to examine all your breast tissue. Be sure to palpate carefully beneath the nipple. Any incision should also be carefully examined from end to end. Women who have had any breast surgery should still examine the entire area and the incision.



Start in the armpit, proceed downward to the lower boundary. Move a finger's width toward the middle and continue palpating upward until you reach the collarbone. Repeat this until you have covered all the breast tissue. Make at least six strips before the nipple, and four strips after the nipple. You may need between 10 and 16 strips to cover all of your breast tissue.

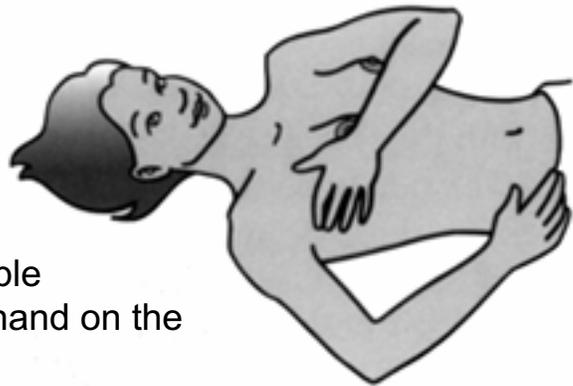
If you get tired easily, break the examination into smaller parts, for example, checking half of one breast up to the nipple, and then taking a break before starting again where you left off.

Schedule your breast self examination for a time of day when you are well rested, and your energy level is at its best.

## Axillary Examinations:

Examine the breast tissue that extends into your armpit while your arm is relaxed at your side.

If you can use only one hand, or have trouble reaching across your chest, try to use the hand on the same side to check your armpit.



## 6. PRACTICE WITH FEEDBACK



It is important that you perform breast self examination (BSE) while your instructor watches you to be sure you are doing it correctly. Practice your skills until you feel comfortable and confident.

If you are limited in your ability to examine your own breasts, discuss with your health provider, the possibility of having more frequent clinical breast exams.

*Remember the Seven P's for a Complete BSE*

## 7. PLAN OF ACTION

Every woman should have a personal breast health plan of action

- DISCUSS** breast cancer detection guidelines with your health professional.
- SCHEDULE** your clinical breast examination and mammogram as appropriate for your age.
- PERFORM** monthly breast self examinations (BSE). Ask your health professional for feedback on your skills.
- ASK** your health care provider if it might be advisable for you to have a clinical breast examination more frequently, if it is difficult for you to do part or all of the BSE yourself. Ask a caregiver or family member to learn to perform your exam if you are unable.
- REPORT** any breast changes to your health care provider.

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The Women's Foundation

### *The Seven P's*

- |              |              |                           |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Positions | 3. Palpation | 6. Practice with Feedback |
| 2. Perimeter | 4. Pressure  | 7. Plan of Action         |
|              | 5. Pattern   |                           |