

Every woman should learn to examine her breasts using the breast self-exam (BSE) once each month, to feel for lumps or irregularities in the breast. The normal breast is composed of thick, glandular and fatty tissue that is often unevenly distributed.

There are many good reasons for doing a breast self-exam each month. First, the more you do it the better you will get to know how your breasts normally feel, you will quickly be able to feel any change in your breast. The greatest concern is the early detection of breast cancer, however, approximately 80-90% of all breast lumps are not cancerous.

What are fibrocystic breast changes?

Fibrocystic change is the most common benign (non-cancerous) condition of the breast, which causes breast tenderness and breast lumps. Fibroadenomas, are another common cause of benign breast lumps. These are solid lumps of fibrous tissue.

How does it occur?

The cause of fibrocystic breast change is unknown. Breast tissue changes are influenced by the menstrual cycle. Estrogen and other hormones produced by the ovaries may play a role in fibrocystic breast conditions. Drinking beverages and eating foods that contain caffeine and caffeine-like substances (methylxanthines) may also contribute to breast changes.

What are the symptoms?

One or both breasts may develop lumps and become tender during the week or so before the start of your menstrual period. Or you may notice lumps in your breast during breast self-exam.

How is fibrocystic disease diagnosed?

Usually, your health care provider can diagnose fibrocystic changes with a physical examination. To be sure of the diagnosis, your provider may recommend that you:

- Get a mammogram
- Get a breast ultrasound
- Have an aspiration of the cyst (removal of fluid from the cyst)
- Simply return for another exam in 2 to 6 weeks, depending on where you are in your menstrual cycle.



How is it treated?

To reduce the size of lumps or cysts or to prevent the formation of new lumps, your health care provider may suggest that you try avoiding caffeine and/or chocolate.

Evening primrose oil, available at health food stores, and vitamin E (200-400 units a day), help reduce or prevent some women's breast symptoms. Nonprescription drugs, such as ibuprofen and aspirin, may be helpful for pain. If your symptoms are severe, you may want to discuss the pros and cons of the prescription drugs, *bromocriptine*, *danazol* or oral contraceptives.

Some cysts can be treated in the provider's office by aspiration. In this procedure, after local anesthesia, fluid in the lump is removed with a needle attached to a syringe. If a lump doesn't disappear completely after aspiration, it should be reevaluated by your health care provider.

How long will the effects last?

The lumps may get larger or smaller but they will not disappear. There is no known cure for this disorder, but it is not harmful and rarely develops into breast cancer.

How can I take care of myself?

Always do monthly breast exams after your menstrual period.

Have a yearly physical examination by your health care provider.

Get regular screening mammograms as advised by your provider.

Because lumps can be a symptom of either fibrocystic breast changes or cancer, it is important to see your health care provider when:

You haven't had a breast exam in over one (1) year

New lumps appear

An existing lump changes in some way

Other breast symptoms develop, such as dimpling of the skin or discharge from the nipple.

How can I prevent fibrocystic breast changes?

To prevent fibrocystic breast changes, some providers advise avoiding food and beverages that contain caffeine, such as coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate.

The importance of performing monthly breast self exams and having your health care provider do a yearly breast exam cannot be overemphasized.

Breast Self Exam

GUIDELINES

When to do a Breast Self-Exam

The best time to do a breast self-exam is right after your menstrual period, when your breasts are not as tender or swollen. If you do not have regular periods or sometimes skip a month, do it on the same day every month.

How to do a Breast Self-Exam

You may do your exam while in the shower or tub. Some breast changes can be felt more easily when your skin is wet and soapy.

1. Put one hand behind your head.
2. With your fingers flat and using the finger pads of your three middle fingers (*do not use fingertips*) move your hand over the entire breast area feeling for lumps or thickening.
3. Use your right hand for examining your left breast the left hand for examining the right breast.
4. Move around the breast in a set way. You can choose either the circle, (A), the up and down (B), or the wedge (C). Do it the same way every time you do a breast self-exam.



A

B

C

5. Stand in front of a mirror and check your breasts for any dimpling of the skin, changes in the nipple, redness, or swelling.

For the Early Detection of Breast Cancer from The American Cancer Society

AGE 40 AND OVER:

- Annual mammogram
- Annual clinical breast exam by a doctor or nurse. (Clinical breast exam should be done close to the time of the mammogram)
- Monthly breast self-exam

AGE 20—39:

- Clinical breast exam by a doctor or nurse every three years
- Monthly breast self-exam

Note: If you have a history of breast cancer in your family, discuss mammography screening guidelines and scheduling with your health care provider.

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Breast Self Exam And Fibrocystic Breast Condition



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