



Detroit Medical Center Breast Health Information

Step 1. Breast Self-Examination (BSE)

A woman should begin practicing breast self-examination by the age of 20 and continue the practice throughout her life - even during pregnancy and after menopause. BSE should be done regularly at the same time every month. Regular BSE teaches you to know how your breasts normally feel so that you can more readily detect any change. Changes may include:

- development of a lump
- a discharge other than breast milk
- swelling of the breast
- skin irritation or dimpling
- nipple abnormalities (i.e., pain, redness, scaliness, turning inward)

If you notice any of these changes, see your healthcare provider as soon as possible for evaluation.

Step 2. Clinical Examination

A breast examination by a physician or nurse trained to evaluate breast problems should be part of a woman's physical examination. The American Cancer Society recommends:

- Between the ages of 20 and 39, women should have a clinical breast examination by a health professional every three years.
- After age 40, women should have a breast exam by a health professional every year.

Step 3. Mammography

Mammography is a low-dose x-ray of the breasts to find changes that may occur. It is the most common imaging technique. Mammography can detect cancer or other problems before a lump becomes large enough to be felt, as well as assist in the diagnosis of other breast problems. However, a biopsy is required to confirm the presence of cancer. Talk with your physician about a mammography schedule that is appropriate for you based on your health and medical history, risk factors, and personal preference.

If you are concerned about breast health, discuss it with your doctor. If you do not have a doctor, the DMC can find one for you. Call 888-DMC-2500 between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday – Friday.

The thought of breast cancer is frightening. But, ignoring the possibility that you may develop breast cancer or avoiding the processes to detect cancer can be dangerous.

Although there are some women who are at higher risk, the fact is all women are at risk for breast cancer. Routine care is the best way to keep you and your breasts healthy. Although detecting breast cancer at its earliest stages is the main goal of routine breast care, other benign conditions, such as fibrocystic breasts, are often discovered through routine care.

That is why it is important to follow this three-step plan for preventive care. Early detection of problems provides the greatest possibility of successful treatment.