About your breasts

Breasts are made up of ducts, lobules, fibrous tissue, and fat. Under the breasts are muscles and ribs. The tissues may make your breasts feel lumpy or uneven.

Changes in breast tissue are common over a lifetime due to aging and hormone changes. Women may have swelling, one or more lumps, tenderness, or pain in the breast before and during their period or menstrual cycle.

Breast self-awareness

**Know how your breasts normally look and feel**, so you are able to detect any changes. It’s important to learn what is normal for your breasts. This is called breast self-awareness.

Many experts now say that women should focus on breast self-awareness instead of doing a breast self exam. Breast self-awareness is about knowing what’s normal for your breasts. If you notice any changes report them to your provider right away.

**Call your provider if:**

- If you see or feel a change in either of your breasts or if you are not sure what you are feeling.
- Your nipples have discharge (other than breast milk), are painful, or more red than normal.
- You have an itchy, scaly sore, or rash on the nipple.
- You have signs of infection in your breasts, called mastitis, such as swelling, pain, redness, or warmth.
- There are changes to your breast from your last exam, such as new lumps in your breast or under your armpit.
- There is a change in the size or shape of one of the breasts.
- You notice skin irritation, such as redness, thickening, or dimpling of your skin or nipple.
- Your breast looks darker.

Changes in breast tissue are common. Most changes are not cancer, but you should always have your breast checked by your health care provider if you see or feel any change.
Breast screening

In addition to practicing self-breast awareness, women should have:

- Yearly breast exams by your health care provider. Your health care provider may instruct you on self-breast exam.
- Mammogram every year starting at age 40. Your risk factors for breast cancer may change when it is recommended for you.

Mammogram

A mammogram is an x-ray of your breasts. It is used to check for signs of breast cancer. To do the mammogram, the technologist will compress or squeeze each of your breasts between two flat plates and take x-ray pictures from different angles. You will be told to hold your breath and not to move while the pictures are taken. It may feel a little uncomfortable, but should not hurt.

After the test, there can sometimes be a change in the skin color of one or both breasts. This goes away in a day or two. You may feel achy or tender from the squeezing of the breasts. This will go away on its own.

The report of the mammogram will be sent to your health care provider and then shared with you. If there are any areas that are not clear, you may need to have the mammogram repeated.

About breast cancer

One in 8 women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. Risk factors for breast cancer include:

- Being female
- Aging
- Family and personal history of breast or ovarian cancer
- Periods (menses) starting before age 12 or stopping after age 55
- History of abnormal breast changes or dense breast tissue
- Being inactive or overweight after menopause
- Drinking 1 or more alcoholic drinks a day
- Hormone therapy or birth control pills after menopause

Mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms. Having regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.

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