



Administered by the Alberta Medical Association

The Early Detection of Breast Cancer

What You and Your Doctor Can Do

Have a regular mammogram

Do a monthly breast self examination

Have a yearly clinical breast examination

Am I at risk for getting breast cancer?

- ◆ every woman has a risk of getting breast cancer;
- ◆ this risk increases as you get older;
- ◆ there are many other risk factors, few of which you can change. Most women who develop breast cancer have none of the commonly recognized factors that increase risk other than being female.

How can I find breast cancer early?

Depending on your age:

- ◆ have regular mammograms;
- ◆ do monthly breast self examinations;
- ◆ have a yearly clinical breast examination.

At any time if you find any abnormality, you should discuss it with your doctor who may order tests.

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is a special x-ray of your breasts. It is the best way to find breast cancer early, before a lump in the breast is detected.

Mammograms use lower levels of radiation than ordinary chest x-rays and are safe.

Should I have regular mammograms?

- ◆ If you are under the age of 40, your risk of getting breast cancer is low. There is not enough evidence to recommend routine breast screening for women in this age group. If you have two or more first degree relatives (mother, sister, daughter) with breast cancer, your doctor may suggest that you start having mammograms earlier. However, if you have concerns about breast cancer, please discuss them with your family doctor during your next check-up.
- ◆ If you are a woman between the ages of 40 and 49, you should discuss breast screening with your doctor. If you decide to have a mammogram, it is recommended that you do so every year until age 50.
- ◆ If you are a woman aged 50 to 69 years, it is strongly recommended that you have a mammogram every two years. In certain circumstances annual mammograms may be recommended by your physician.
- ◆ If you are over the age of 69 years, your risk of breast cancer is still high. You and your doctor should discuss your screening needs.

Most, but not all, breast cancers can be seen with mammography. At any time, remember if you have new signs or symptoms discuss them with your doctor.

How do I arrange for a mammogram?

Contact:

- ◆ your family physician;
- ◆ radiology facilities that offer screening mammography; or
- ◆ the Alberta Screen Test Program at: 1-800-667-0604

What happens when I have a mammogram?

When you have your mammogram you will be asked to remove your clothes from the waist up. You may find it easier to wear slacks or a skirt and a top.

X-rays will be taken of both your breasts. Your breasts will rest on a shelf and be gently compressed. You will feel some pressure which is necessary to spread out your breast so that a clear mammogram can be taken. This pressure will only last for a few seconds. Your breast may become sore for a few days.

What should I do after I've had my mammogram?

Once you have had your mammogram be sure to:

- ◆ find out the results;
- ◆ discuss with your doctor when you should have your next mammogram;
- ◆ make a note in your calendar when your next mammogram is due;
- ◆ continue your regular breast examinations and be sure to talk to your doctor about any abnormalities or changes that concern you.

What is Breast Self Examination?

Breast Self Examination (BSE) is a procedure to help you examine your own breasts.

Should I do BSE?

By the age of 30, you should be familiar with the look and feel of your breasts. It is important that you do a BSE every month even if you are pregnant. The best time to examine your breasts is one to two weeks after your period starts. If you are no longer menstruating, you should set a regular date for BSE each month.

What do I look for when I do a BSE?

- ◆ unusual thickening of your breasts;
- ◆ sticky or bloody discharge from the nipple;
- ◆ changes in the skin of your nipples or breasts, such as puckering, dimpling, or redness;
- ◆ unusual increase in the size of one breast.

How do I do a BSE?

Visual Check

- A. Stand in front of a mirror and look at your breasts carefully - first face forward and then turn slowly side to side.



- B. Lift your arms above your head. If you have pendulous breasts you may need to lift them up to see the lower halves.



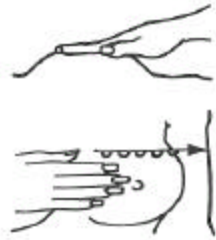
- C. Lower your hands part way and squeeze your palms together in front of your forehead.



Hand Check - Standing

Use the opposite hand for each breast.

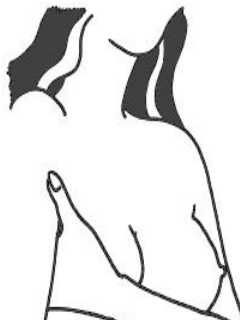
- A. Use a flat hand.
Bend your wrist,
not your fingers, to
go over curves.
Apply moderate
pressure and keep
constant contact.



- B. Move back and forth across the breast in a straight line pattern, making constant small circles. Slide your hand down one finger width for each pass. Cover the full area indicated.



- C. Check the area under your arm and well into your armpit. Relax your arm, place your hand under it, making the same small circular movements as before.



What is a Clinical Breast Exam?

A Clinical Breast Exam (CBE) is when your doctor or another trained health professional checks your breasts for any abnormal changes. This is also a good time to ask if you are doing BSE correctly.

Should I have a CBE?

By the age of 40 it is important to have your breasts examined yearly by your doctor. Make an appointment with your doctor when it is time for your breasts to be examined.

This information guide was prepared by the Early Detection of Breast Cancer Working Group of the Alberta Clinical Practice Guidelines Program to assist you with decisions

about breast cancer screening. If you have any questions please ask your doctor or contact the Alberta Breast Cancer Screen Test Program at:
1-800-667-0604

The Early Detection of Breast Cancer Working Group is a multidisciplinary team comprised of a family physician, general practitioners, radiologists, general surgeons, a gynecologist, oncologist, pathologist, epidemiologist, Medical Officer of Health, nurse, medical student, public representatives, the Canadian Cancer Society, and Breast Cancer Policy Council representatives.

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Alberta Clinical Practice Guidelines Program
12230 - 106 Avenue
EDMONTON, Alberta T5N 3Z1

Date of mammogram:

Date of next mammogram:

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