

BREAST EXAMS.

You have the primary responsibility for your own health. Your doctor can only do his or her part if you do yours. Performing a monthly breast self-examination is a very important part of this responsibility because it is the best way to detect breast cancer in its early stages. But before you examine your breasts, let's look at the facts:

- Most breast lumps are not found by doctors. They are found by women, either by accident or when performing breast self-examination.
- Most breast lumps turn out to be benign (noncancerous) and are not dangerous.
- Even if a lump is cancerous, the cancer can be cured in roughly nine out of ten cases if it is found early enough and provided the disease is confined to the breast. That's why early detection is so important.

Add up all of these facts and look in a mirror. You are looking at the best tool you and your doctor have to lower the risks of breast cancer-YOU.

WHEN SHOULD I EXAMINE MY BREASTS?

Each month, about a week after your menstrual period ends. Waiting a week allows the breast swelling you may experience around the time of your period to go away. If you don't have monthly periods because you have experienced menopause, choose a date each month that is easy to remember and perform your exam on that date each month.

WHEN SHOULD MY DOCTOR EXAMINE MY BREASTS?

You should be seeing your physician for routine check-ups at least once a year. At each visit your doctor should perform a breast exam. If you find a lump or something that doesn't feel right between doctor visits, call your physician and schedule an appointment. Medical testing may be necessary to determine the nature of the problem.

WHAT IS MAMMOGRAPHY?

Mammography is the process of making a mammogram, which is an X ray of the breast. A mammogram can find lumps that are so small that they cannot be felt and would not be noticeable to you or your doctor for two or three years. Incidentally, mammography poses virtually no risk of cancer. Do not postpone mammography because you are afraid it will give you cancer.

WHEN SHOULD I HAVE MAMMOGRAPHY?

Women who show no signs of breast cancer should be "screened" for the disease at different stages of life. If you are between the ages of 35 and 40, you should have "baseline" screening mammography. Your doctor can compare future mammograms to this first one so that any changes in your breasts can be detected. Women between the ages of 40 and 49 should have screening mammography once every one or two years. Your doctor will tell you how often is best for you. Women over 50 should be screened every year. These routine mammograms will be compared with your baseline one (and with subsequent ones).

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO REDUCE THE RISK OF BREAST CANCER?

Many physicians believe that reducing fat intake to less than 30% of your daily diet can lower the risk of breast cancer. A low-fat diet (in addition to reducing salt and caffeine intake) may also help you avoid noncancerous lumps that masquerade as cancer.

AM I AT HIGHER RISK THAN OTHER WOMEN?

About 10% of American women will develop breast cancer. The American Cancer Society believes the following factors can increase your risk:

- Being over 50 years old.
- Having a close relative with breast cancer. eBeing childless or having your first child after 30.

If one of these factors applies to you, you should see your physician more regularly.