



FACTS FOR LIFE Breast Cancer Detection

Breast cancer screening methods

Mammogram — A mammogram is an X-ray picture of the breast. It is done with a special X-ray machine designed for this purpose. The picture is stored on film (standard) or into a computer (digital). A mammogram can find many cancers before they can be felt.

Clinical breast exam — A breast exam by a health care provider should be part of your regular medical checkup. If it is not, ask for it. A clinical breast exam includes a visual examination and carefully feeling the entire breast and underarm area. If you are 40 or older, schedule your mammogram close to the time of your clinical breast exam.

Breast self-exam (BSE) — Is a tool that may help you learn what is normal for you. BSE includes looking at and feeling your breasts. Many women have a pattern of lumpiness in their breasts, which is normal. But if you feel any change or a new lump in your breasts or underarms, ask your doctor to examine the area. (For step-by-step BSE instructions, go to www.komen.org/bse.)

Now is the best time

Believe it or not, the best time to check for breast cancer is when your breasts feel fine. If you find cancer early, there are more treatment options and a much better chance for survival. Mammography is the best screening method used today to find breast cancer early. However, it is not perfect. But, when mammography is combined with clinical breast exam your chances for finding cancer are even greater.

Remember, even if you feel healthy now, just being a woman and getting older puts you at risk for breast cancer. Getting checked regularly can put your mind at ease. And finding cancer early may save your life.

Find your age on the chart below to see which screening methods you should use and how often. Women under age 40 with either a family history of breast cancer or other concerns about their personal risk should talk with their health care provider about when to start getting mammograms or other tests, such as breast MRI, and how often to have them.

Age 20-39	Frequency	Age 40 and older	Frequency
clinical breast exam	at least every three years	mammogram	once a year
BSE is a tool that can be used to learn what is normal for you. Women at higher risk may need to get screened earlier and more frequently than recommended.		clinical breast exam BSE is a tool that can be used to learn what is normal for you.	

For more information, call Susan G. Komen for the Cure® at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) or visit www.komen.org.

Questions to ask

Talk with your health care provider about your risk of breast cancer. Ask which screening methods are right for you.

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

1. What is my personal risk for getting breast cancer?
2. Do I need a mammogram? If not, why not?
3. Where can I go to get a mammogram?
4. What if I cannot afford a mammogram?
5. How often should I get a mammogram?
6. How often do I need a clinical breast exam?
7. What is the best way to do a breast self-exam?
8. Should I consider additional tests related to my risk?

Resources

You can receive information about mammograms and clinical breast exams by contacting the organizations listed on this page. You may also go to www.komen.org/bse for step-by-step BSE instructions.

Susan G. Komen for the Cure®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345
www.cancer.org

National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service
1-800-4-CANCER
www.cancer.gov

Trouble signs that should not be ignored

Be aware of possible problems in your breast or underarm area. If you notice any of the following signs, make an appointment with your health care provider right away.

- lumps, hard knot or thickening in any part of the breast
- swelling, warmth, redness or darkening that does not go away
- change in the size or shape of your breast
- dimpling or puckering of the skin of your breast
- itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
- pulling in of your nipple or other parts of the breast
- nipple discharge that starts suddenly
- new pain in one spot that does not go away

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Benign Breast Changes
- Breast Cancer Facts
- Mammography
- When You Discover a Lump

The above list of resources is only a suggested resource and is not a complete listing of breast health and breast cancer materials or information. The information contained herein is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. Komen for the Cure does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referenced herein.

Developed in collaboration with the Health Communication Research Laboratory at Saint Louis University. ©2008 Susan G. Komen for the Cure. Item No. 806-374a 8/08