



BREAST SELF EXAMINATION & PAP TEST

Breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer deaths in women in Australia. Cervical cancer is also a common form of cancer in women. The sooner changes in your breasts or abnormal cervical cells are discovered, the greater the chance of successful treatment. You can protect your health by examining your breasts every month and by having a regular Pap test.

Although a breast lump or abnormal Pap test result can be worrying, 9 out of 10 breast lumps are not cancer and most abnormal cervical cells can be successfully treated.

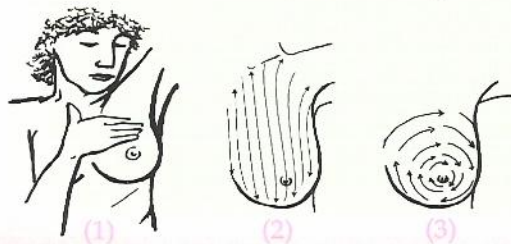
HOW TO EXAMINE YOUR BREASTS

You can examine your breasts in the shower or while lying down with a pillow under the shoulder (especially useful if you have large breasts).

- Lift one elbow and place your hand behind your head.
- Use the flat part of the fingers on your other hand to feel each part of your breast. Move over the skin making small circles of light but firm pressure. (1)
- Examine the whole breast and armpit area lightly (to detect surface lumps) and then firmly (to detect deeper lumps). A ridge of tissue felt at the lower curve of the breast is normal.

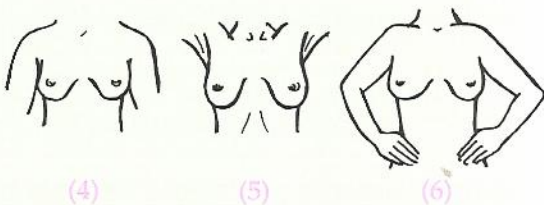
Use one of the following methods to ensure you cover your whole breast:

- start in your armpit and work up and down in vertical strips, across your whole breast and up to the collarbone (2); or
- examine each breast in widening circles (3), starting at the nipple and reaching up to the collar bone and into the armpit.



Then, in front of the mirror look for nipple discharge or any changes in the shape or surface of the breasts (e.g. dimpling, puckering or withdrawal of the nipple). Do this with your:

- arms by your sides (4)
- arms raised over the head, turning slowly from side to side (5)
- hands on your hips, pressing firmly down to tense the breast muscles and thrust the breasts forward. (6)



WHAT IS A PAP TEST?

A Pap test looks for changes in the cervical cells that could develop into cancer if not treated.

- During a Pap test, cells are collected from the cervix (lower opening of the womb) with a small brush or spatula.
- The test can cause a little discomfort - some women feel nothing at all.
- The cells are then examined under a microscope for any changes.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

The symptoms below do not necessarily mean breast or cervical cancer. However, see your doctor straight away if you have:

- a lump in your breast
- changes in an existing lump
- skin changes - flaking, crusting or 'weeping' around the nipple, dimpling of the skin (like orange peel) over a part of one breast
- withdrawal of the nipple
- pain in the breast
- irregular bleeding between periods
- bleeding after intercourse
- more discharge than usual from the vagina, possibly brown or blood stained (including bleeding after you have had menopause).

Your doctor can decide if these symptoms are cause for concern.

SELF CARE

Breasts

- Do a breast self examination once a month, just after your period (see *How to examine your breasts*).
- If your periods have stopped, examine your breasts on the first day of each month - mark it on a calendar.
- Every woman's breasts are different, and one breast may differ from another. Examining your breasts regularly will help you to notice any changes.
- Ask your doctor to examine your breasts regularly. When you have your Pap test is a good time.
- Once you are over 50 years of age have a mammogram every two years. Ask your doctor.

Cervix

- You should have a Pap test every two years if you are between 18 and 70 years of age and have ever had sex.
- Check the result of your test, it usually takes about a week.
- Make a note of the date of your last Pap test. Most states have a Pap test registry which records the results of your Pap test and sends you a reminder notice when you are due for your next test.
- Regular Pap tests are important even if you no longer have periods or haven't had sex for many years.
- The best time to have a Pap test is midway between two periods. If you no longer have periods, any time is good.
- Talk to your doctor about the need for further Pap tests if you have had a hysterectomy.

Recommended reading:

Australian Women's Health Handbook
Gore & Osment, 1994

LEE K
All About Breasts
Gore & Osment, 1993

Contact:

Your doctor - listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book

Your State Cancer Council - listed under 'C' in the white pages of the phone book

BreastScreen - National breast screening program.
Information and appointments - ph. 13 20 50

The Family Planning Association - listed under 'F' in the white pages of the phone book

Your local Women's or Community Health Centre - listed in the white pages of the phone book

Your Self Care pharmacist. To find:

ACT	(02) 6283 4703	NSW	(02) 9437 5941
TAS	(03) 6231 2636	VIC	(03) 9903 9600
QLD	(07) 3844 4900	WA	(08) 9388 2886
SA	(08) 8272 1211		

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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