Breast Awareness

Know what to look and feel for...
What is breast awareness?

Breast awareness is knowing your breasts and being aware of what is normal for you at all times of your monthly cycle. When you know how your breasts normally look and feel you will be able to notice any changes.

Most changes are harmless, but should be checked by a doctor. A change is seldom due to cancer but even if it is, earlier detection may mean simpler and more successful treatment.

When should you check?

This is up to you, but you have probably noticed that your breasts change during your monthly cycle. Many women have lumpy, tender breasts just before their period and soft breasts immediately afterwards.

Although it will be easier to make comparisons when the breasts are soft, it is wise to be aware of the changes throughout your cycle.

Remember!

Before the menopause breasts can change at different times during the month.

After a hysterectomy breasts can show the same monthly changes until the time when periods would have stopped.

After the menopause breasts feel softer and less lumpy.
What should you check for?

Remember you are looking for any change in your breasts which is **not normal for you**.

The first time you check your breasts - **REMEMBER:**

- The usual shape and size of your breasts (it is not unusual for one breast to be larger than the other).
- The usual appearance and position of your nipples.
- The usual ‘feel’ of your breasts.

What if you find any changes?

- If you find any changes, seek medical advice without delay. Most breast changes are harmless but are due to cysts or lumps, which can be treated easily.
- The only certain way to know what is causing the problem is to make an appointment to see your doctor who will check any changes.
- Even if you have breast cancer, early detection and prompt treatment give the best results.

*Whatever age you are, if you are worried about any breast problems don’t delay contact your doctor straight away.*
How do you check?

By looking...

1. When preparing for a bath or shower stand in front of a mirror with arms to your sides and look at each breast in turn.

2. Raise hands above head, press palms closely together with fingers pointing upwards. Squeeze hard and then examine under your breasts.

3. Place your hands on your hips and then press inwards until your chest muscles tighten.

Look carefully at your breasts from every angle - from the sides - underneath - lean forwards and look at the shape of your breasts.

By feeling...

1. Do this in the bath or shower with a soapy hand so that it will slide easily over the breast. For women with larger breasts this may be easier when lying on the bed.

2. Do not squeeze or prod your breasts. Keep fingers together and use them flat. Press the breast gently but firmly by moving your fingers over the whole breast. It is easier to use the right hand to feel the left breast and vice versa.

3. Remember your breasts are pear shaped with the point of the breast going into the armpit. Feel every part of the breast, including upwards towards the collarbone, into the armpit and behind the nipple.

Your Practice Nurse can help you become breast aware
Changes to look for

- Change in size.
- Change in outline (any flattening).
- Any obvious lumps or thickening.
- Puckering or dimpling of the skin.
- Veins which stand out more than usual.
- Any change in the position of the nipple - pulled in or pointing to the side.
- Rash around the nipple.
- Blood or discharge from the nipple (some women always produce a little clear or milky fluid which is normal for them).
- Any changes in sensation - particularly when new and only in one breast.
- Any swelling in the armpit or breast.
- Constant pain in the armpit or breast.
- Anything that is *not normal for you*.

Be Breast Aware

- Know what is normal for you.
- Look and feel for changes.
- Know what changes to look for.
- If you find any changes - *seek medical advice without delay*.
- Attend for breast screening if aged 50 or over.

*Contains photographs of breast examination*
Breast Screening

This is an x-ray procedure (mammogram) which can detect breast changes at a very early stage.

**Women aged 50-70 years**

- When you have reached the age of 50 you will be invited to attend for breast screening; however you may not receive your invitation in the year that you are 50 but as long as you are registered with a doctor, an appointment will be sent to you before your 53rd birthday.

- It is important to attend your three yearly free mammogram (breast x-ray) from the NHS Breast Screening Programme.

- If you are between 65 and 70 and have not been invited for a free mammogram in the last three years, you can request one.

- Be breast aware between mammograms.

- Don't wait until your next mammogram to report any changes.

**Women over 70 years**

- If you are over 70 you can request a free mammogram as you will not automatically receive an invitation - contact your doctor or local breast screening unit to arrange an appointment. Stay breast aware as you are still at risk and most changes are detected by women examining themselves.

**Women under 50 years**

- Be breast aware.

- See your doctor if there is anything not normal for you.

- You are not included in the NHS Breast Screening Programme until you have reached the age of 50.

For more information or advice contact your own doctor, or

NHS Direct 0845 4647 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NHS Cancer Screening Programmes www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk