



Breast Self Exam: One More Layer of Protection ...and it's free!

One of the major goals of Be Aware is to inspire women to follow early detection guidelines. The guideline that is most challenging for women to follow is monthly self-examination. There are multiple reasons why women are inconsistent in doing Breast Self Exams. One of the major reasons is that doing BSE causes anxieties. The reason for this anxiety is that breasts are typically lumpy and tender. When a woman attempts to do BSE, this lumpiness causes anxiety. They often ask me, "How am I to know if these lumps are normal or if one of them is a cancer?"

Adding to the confusion are the mixed messages women get about doing BSE. Some "experts" suggest that BSE does not work. Many national organizations suggest that a woman be familiar with her breasts, but it is up to individual women to decide whether or not to do BSE. Given these confusing messages and the challenges involved in learning to do BSE with confidence, it is no wonder that the vast majority of women do not do BSE.

I have been in practice for almost 40 years and have personally diagnosed and treated over 5,000 women with breast cancer. Approximately one half of all newly diagnosed women with breast cancer have a lump. In a high percentage of these cases, earlier detection of the lump could have been achieved if the women were doing the kind of breast self-exam that I teach.

Teaching women to do self-exam with confidence is a challenge for physicians because it takes time. In the best case scenario, I can teach most women to do BSE with confidence in about 10 minutes. The basic principals are fairly simple. Once I have completed a normal exam, I explain to the patient that tonight is the best time to start the process of learning BSE with confidence, because you can be confident that the texture of breast tissue that you will be feeling is NORMAL.

It is essential that a woman starts the process of BSE with confidence that her breasts are normal. Thus, the best time to start the exam is on the same night that an experienced health care provider judged her breast to be normal. One of the most important steps in gaining confidence in doing BSE is to not look for breast lumps. The goal must be to: "Visualize, not Analyze." Once a woman has a clear mental image of her normal breast and does a complete exam every month, she will be better able than her physician to detect a subtle change. If a woman does detect a change, she must report it to her physician. It is the physician's job to determine if the change is of importance. A true story of just how easy it is to find an early cancer was reported in the first issue of "Ask the Doctor" and is worth a quick read: <http://beawarefoundation.org/lisas-story>

Be sure to watch and share our educational video at <http://beawarefoundation.org/breast-self-exam-video> showing women how to do a breast self exam with confidence.

If you have any questions on breast self exams or breast cancer, feel free to Ask The Doctor or contact us.