

Breast Self Examination (BSE)

Once a month, you will check your treated breast or mastectomy site, the opposite breast and underarms by following the instructions below. It is very important to keep all your doctor appointments and to report any noticeable changes to your health care provider.

Why Should You Perform BSE?

If the cancer returns, it may be at the scar site in the breast or underarm area. Therefore, it is important to become familiar with the appearance, texture and feel of your scar and the surrounding chest area.

You may discover changes in your breast and chest area before your doctor does. Be sure to tell your doctor about any changes.

When to Do Your Monthly BSE

If you are menstruating regularly, do your BSE two to five days after the last day of your period when normal premenstrual swelling is gone.

If you are no longer menstruating regularly, choose a specific day of the month (e.g., your birth date) to do your BSE.

If you have had breast reconstruction or augmentation, examine this area using the same BSE procedure you used before your surgery. Pay particular attention to the outer edge of the new tissue and skin as you examine yourself.

How to Examine Your Breast, Chest Wall and Underarm

Stand in front of a well-lit mirror. Look at your breast or mastectomy site and underarm in the mirror. Tell your doctor immediately if you notice any of the changes below:

- A persistent rash or irritation in the area of your scar (incision).
- Swelling, lumps and/or redness.
- A change in the size or shape of the breast.
- Thickening of the skin.
- Change in skin color.

Palpation (the medical term for touching) may be done more accurately and easily in the shower using soap or out of the shower using body lotion on your hands.

Check the surgical scar. With two fingers together, press the area gently using small circular motions. Check the chest wall using three or four fingers together in sweeping motion. Next, feel the base of your neck, above and below your collarbones and in your underarms by moving your fingers across those areas. Tell your doctor immediately if you feel any of the changes below:

- New or unusual swelling and/or soreness.
- New lumps.
- Thickening of the skin.
- A rash or bumps.