

# Breast Cancer Screening



*Screening is a way to detect breast cancer early, when it is easiest to treat.*

**B**reast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women. Although we don't know exactly how to prevent breast cancer, it can be treated if caught early. Screening, therefore, is a way to detect breast cancer when it is easiest to treat.

There are currently three methods of screening (testing) for breast cancer. They are most effective when used together:

1. **Mammography:** Specialized X-ray of the breast
2. **Clinical breast examination:** Physical examination of the breast by your doctor or nurse practitioner
3. **Breast self-examination:** Checking your own breasts for lumps or changes to the tissue

Kaiser Permanente's screening guidelines are organized by age and level of risk. If you do have symptoms (such as a lump, pain, discharge, redness, or any change in your breast), call your doctor or nurse practitioner immediately. *These recommendations are for women who have no breast symptoms.*

Certain personal, family, or genetic influences may increase your chance of developing breast cancer. If you have a family history of breast cancer that concerns you, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner for specific screening guidelines.

## Average risk screening guidelines

Average risk refers to women who do not have the risk factors described in the high risk screening guidelines (see below). Most women are average risk.

Age	Mammography	Clinical breast exam	Self-exam
20-39	Not recommended	With routine gyn exams	Monthly
40-74	Every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years	Monthly
75 +	You and your physician or other medical professional decide together.	You and your physician or other medical professional decide together.	Monthly

## High risk screening guidelines

High risk refers to women who have either:

- a personal history of breast cancer (a woman who has had breast cancer), or
- a family history of a mother, sister, or daughter with breast cancer before the age of 50.

Age	Mammography	Clinical breast exam	Self-exam
20-34	Not recommended	Every 1-2 years	Monthly
35-74	Every year	Every year	Monthly
75 +	You and your physician or other medical professional decide together.	You and your physician or other medical professional decide together.	Monthly





## Breast self-exam

Establish a regular time each month to examine your breasts, such as a few days after your period when your breasts are not swollen or tender. Women who do not menstruate can examine their breasts the first day of each month.

Most women's breast tissue has some lumps or thickening. When in doubt about a particular lump, check the other breast. If you find a similar lump in the same area on the other breast, both breasts are probably normal. Be on the lookout for changes, thickening, or new lumps.

Have any areas of concern checked by your medical professional. The important thing is to learn what is normal for you and to report changes to your doctor.

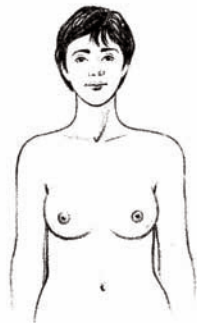
The breast self-exam takes place in two phases.

### Phase 1: In front of the mirror

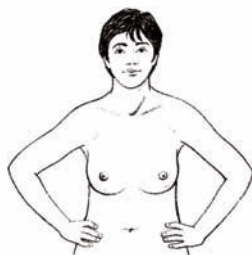
Examine your breasts visually in a mirror. Few women have breasts that match exactly. It is normal for one breast to be slightly larger than the other. Learn what is normal for you.

Look at your breasts in three positions:

- Stand with your arms at your sides



- With your hands on your hips



- With your arms raised overhead



In each position, look for changes in the contour and shape of your breasts, the color and texture of the skin and nipple, and any discharge from the nipples.

### Phase 2: Lying down

To examine your left breast, place a pillow or folded towel under your left shoulder. Use your right hand to examine your left breast. If your breasts are large, lie on your right side and turn your left shoulder back flat to spread the breast tissue more evenly over your chest wall. Use the pads of your middle three fingers to examine your breast. Move the fingers in small, dime-sized circles. Don't lift your fingers away from the skin. Use light, medium, and deep pressure in each spot to feel the full thickness of the breast tissue. You are feeling for lumps, thickening, or changes of any kind.

Examine your entire breast using a vertical strip pattern (see illustration).



Examine all tissue from the collarbone to the armpit and from the bra line to the breastbone. Start in the armpit and work down to the bottom of the bra line. Move one finger width toward the middle and work up to the collarbone. Repeat until you have covered all the breast tissue.

Move the pillow or towel to the other shoulder and repeat this procedure for the other breast.

If you examine your breasts monthly, you will learn what is normal for you and quickly recognize if something changes. The breast self-exam takes some practice. You can learn more about breast self-exams at your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center.

## When to call Kaiser Permanente

If you discover any unusual lumps, thickening, discharge from the nipple, or changes of any kind, report them to your doctor immediately. Remember, most lumps are not malignant, but you will need your doctor to make a diagnosis.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.