

Breast awareness

It is important for women to become familiar with the normal look, feel and shape of their breasts so they will notice any abnormal changes.

There are three steps to being breast aware:

1. Become familiar with the normal look and feel of your breasts.
2. See a doctor if you notice any unusual breast changes.
3. If you are aged 50 to 69, have a mammogram at BreastScreen every two years.

Know what's normal for you

It is important to be familiar with the look and feel of your breasts and to know what is normal for you. To do this:

- Get to know the usual shape of your breasts by regularly looking in the mirror.
- Become familiar with the normal feel of your breasts at different times of the month. You might find this easiest in the shower or bath, lying in bed or getting dressed.
- Feel all the breast tissue, from the collarbone to below the bra line and under the armpit.
- Use the pads of your fingers to feel near the surface and deeper in the breast.

There is no right or wrong way to feel your breasts – it is important to find a way that works for you. Women of all ages should be familiar with their breasts, but it becomes more important as you get older because the risk of breast cancer increases with age.

Changes in breast tissue

Most changes in breast tissue are not cancerous, but there are some changes to look out for that could be a sign of breast cancer. Any changes that should be reported to a doctor include:

- a new lump or lumpiness, especially if it's only in one breast
- a change in the shape or size of your breast
- a change to the nipple, such as crusting, ulceration, redness or recent inversion
- a nipple discharge that occurs without squeezing
- a change in the skin of your breast such as redness or dimpling
- an unusual pain that doesn't go away.

See your doctor if you notice any unusual changes

If you notice any unusual breast changes, see your doctor. The earlier breast cancer is detected and treated, the better the chances of recovery. However, it is important to remember that most breast changes women find are not cancer.

Some non-cancerous conditions that can cause breast lumps and thickenings include:

- **Hormones** – some women's breasts become swollen and lumpy around the time of menstruation.
- **Fibroadenomas** – are lumps made up of normal fibrous and glandular tissue.
- **Cysts** – are small, fluid-filled sacs.
- **Microcalcifications** – are spots of calcium salts.
- **Radial scars** – are star-shaped abnormalities within the breast that form for unknown reasons. Radial scars are usually benign, but may contain cancer cells in some cases.

Screening

Mammographic screening is the best method for detecting breast cancer early, before it can be felt or noticed. For women aged between 50 and 69, regular screening mammograms every two years are the best way to detect breast cancers. Women aged 40 to 49 are welcome to attend BreastScreen. However, because of their breast density, breast x-ray screening is less effective. These women can have an ultrasound in addition to a mammogram. Women over the age of 70 are also welcome to attend BreastScreen.

To book a mammogram, call BreastScreen on 13 20 50. Visit the BreastScreen Victoria website for more information.

Male breast cancer

Breast cancer in men is rare, accounting for less than one per cent of all breast cancers and less than one per cent of all cancers in men. Male breast cancer is usually detected in men aged over 50 years.

Men who notice lumps or other changes in the breast area should see a doctor. Early detection can significantly improve recovery for male breast cancer. The prognosis for men with breast cancer is similar to that of women at the same stage of cancer.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Women's health clinic
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9257 0100
- Cancer Council Helpline Tel. 13 11 20
- BreastScreen Tel. 13 20 50
- Multilingual Cancer Information Line, Victoria Tel. (03) 9209 0169

Things to remember

- Be familiar with the normal look and feel of your breasts.
- If you notice any abnormal changes to your breasts, it is important to see your doctor as soon as possible.
- Most changes in breast tissue are not cancerous.
- If you are a woman aged between 50 and 69, have a screening mammogram at BreastScreen every two years.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Cancer Council Victoria

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.