



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance specialists at Ballard Benefit Works, Inc.

Breast cancer is the seventh leading cause of death for women in the United States.

TAKE CHARGE OF BREAST HEALTH

Breast exams are extremely useful in detecting cancer early. Clinical exams, breast self-exams (BSEs) and mammograms should be completed regularly so that it's possible to determine if there are changes in breast tissue, indicating breast cancer or other potentially harmful conditions.

Clinical Exams and Mammograms

The American Cancer Society recommends clinical breast exams every three years for women between 20 and 40, and annually for women 40 and older. Starting at age 40, healthy women should have yearly mammograms.

Performing Self-Exams

In between clinical exams and mammograms, women should complete BSEs to become familiar with the look and feel of their breasts when healthy, so that changes can be detected as early as possible.

The American Cancer Society recommends the following steps for conducting a BSE:

1. Lie down and place one arm behind your head.
2. Use the pads of your middle three fingers on the opposite hand to check your breast tissue in overlapping, dime-sized circular motions.
3. Use an up-and-down pattern starting at your underarm and moving all the way to the middle of your breastbone to feel for changes.
4. Standing with your hands on your hips, look in a mirror for changes in size, shape, contour or coloring of your breasts.

Breast Tissue Changes

Contact your doctor if you notice any of the following changes to your breast or nipple tissue while doing a BSE:

- Lumps
- Dimpling, red or scaly skin
- Nipple discharge or pain

It is normal for breast tissue to change during menstrual cycles, pregnancy, menopause, or while taking birth control pills or other hormone therapy. However, if you notice changes at other times in your life, it is strongly suggested that you visit a doctor immediately.

More in-depth information on how to perform a BSE is available at www5.komen.org. This website also provides a Breast Self-Awareness Interactive Tool that you can view. Or, check out this diagram on www.breastcancer.org, which illustrates how to perform a thorough self-exam.

