

Your Monthly Routine: The Power of Breast Self-Examination



Breast cancer is one of the most common forms of cancer in women, and early detection is key to successful treatment. One widely advocated method for early detection is breast self-examination (BSE). In this article, we will explore the importance of early detection, the benefits and limitations of BSE, and how to perform it effectively.

The Importance of Early Detection

Early detection of breast cancer can significantly increase the chances of successful treatment and survival. When breast cancer is detected early, before it has spread to nearby lymph nodes or other parts of the body, the five-year survival rate is nearly 100%. In contrast, the five-year survival rate for advanced breast cancer is only around 22%. This underscores the importance of early detection and the need for women to be vigilant in monitoring their breast health.

What is Breast Self-Examination (BSE)?

Breast self-examination (BSE) is a simple and non-invasive method of checking your own breasts for any changes that may indicate breast cancer. It involves visually inspecting and palpating (feeling) the breasts for any lumps, changes in size or shape, or any other abnormalities.

Benefits of Breast Self-Examination (BSE)

Breast self-examination (BSE) is an important way for women to become familiar with their breasts and detect any unusual changes. It is a simple, low-cost method that can be performed in the comfort of one's own home. Here are some benefits of BSE:

- Early detection of breast cancer: Regular BSE can help detect any changes in the breasts early on, which can be a sign of breast cancer. The earlier breast cancer is detected, the better the chances of successful treatment. - Familiarity with one's own breasts: By performing BSE regularly, women become familiar with the normal look and feel of their breasts. This makes it easier to detect any changes or abnormalities that may indicate a problem. - Empowerment: BSE empowers women to take charge of their own breast health. By performing regular self-exams, women can feel more in control and confident about their breast health. - Better communication with healthcare providers: When women detect any changes in their breasts, they can communicate this information to their healthcare provider more effectively. This can lead to better diagnosis and treatment outcomes. - Reduced anxiety: Regular BSE can help reduce anxiety and fear related to breast cancer. Women who perform BSE regularly are more likely to detect any changes early on, which can help alleviate fears and anxieties. - Cost-effective: BSE is a low-cost method that can be performed at home. This makes it an accessible option for women who may not have access to regular healthcare services.

It is important to note that BSE should not replace regular mammograms or clinical breast exams. It is recommended that women continue to receive these screenings as recommended by their healthcare provider. BSE should be performed in addition to these screenings as an extra measure of precaution.

The History of Breast Self-Examination (BSE): Controversies and Effectiveness

Breast self-examination (BSE) has been promoted for many decades as a method for early detection of breast cancer. It involves women examining their breasts on a regular basis to look for any changes, lumps or abnormalities. While BSE has been widely recommended in the past, its popularity has fluctuated over time and there has been some controversy over its effectiveness.

The history of BSE can be traced back to the 1950s, when breast cancer was becoming more widely recognized as a serious health issue. At the time, there were few effective screening methods available, so BSE was often recommended as a way for women to become familiar with their breasts and detect any changes. Women were encouraged to perform BSE on a monthly basis, usually after their period, when the breasts are less likely to be tender or swollen.

In the 1970s and 1980s, BSE gained widespread popularity as a breast cancer screening tool. It was widely promoted through public health campaigns, educational materials, and healthcare providers. However, as more research was conducted on the effectiveness of BSE, some controversies began to arise.

One of the main controversies surrounding BSE is the question of its effectiveness in detecting breast cancer. While some studies have suggested that regular BSE can lead to earlier detection of breast cancer, others have found little or no benefit. Critics of BSE argue that it can lead to false positives, unnecessary biopsies, and increased anxiety and stress for women who detect lumps or changes that turn out to be benign.

Another issue with BSE is that it can be difficult for women to perform correctly. The technique involves a systematic and thorough examination of the entire breast, which can be challenging for some women to do consistently and accurately. This can lead to missed lumps or abnormalities, or to false positives that result from a lack of training or experience in performing the exam.

Despite these controversies, many healthcare providers still recommend that women perform regular BSE as a part of their breast cancer screening routine. The American Cancer Society, for example, recommends that women begin performing BSE in their 20s and continue throughout their lives, in addition to regular clinical breast exams and mammograms.

In conclusion, while BSE has been promoted as a method for early detection of breast cancer, its effectiveness has been the subject of controversy and debate. However, for many women, BSE remains an important tool for becoming familiar with their breasts and detecting any changes or abnormalities. As with all breast cancer screening methods, it is important for women to discuss their individual risks and screening options with their healthcare providers.

The Benefits of Breast Self-Examination (BSE) for Early Detection of Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in women worldwide. According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer accounts for approximately 30% of all new cancer diagnoses in women in the United States. Early detection of breast cancer is essential to improving the chances of successful treatment and recovery. Breast self-examination (BSE) is one method that women can use to detect changes in their breast tissue early on.

When done regularly and correctly, BSE can help women detect changes in their breast tissue, which can lead to early detection of breast cancer. It involves a systematic and thorough examination of the entire breast, including the nipple and the area around the breast, to look for any changes, lumps, or abnormalities. Women are encouraged to perform BSE on a monthly basis, usually after their period, when the breasts are less likely to be tender or swollen.

BSE is a way for women to become more familiar with their breasts and notice any changes. It is an important part of breast cancer screening, especially for women who may be at higher risk for developing breast cancer due to family history or other factors. Regular BSE can help women detect any changes in their breast tissue early on, when they are more treatable.

In addition to its role in early detection of breast cancer, BSE also has other benefits. It empowers women to take charge of their own breast health and become more knowledgeable about their bodies. It also helps women communicate more effectively with their healthcare providers about any changes or concerns they may have regarding their breast health.

BSE is a simple and low-cost method that can be performed in the comfort of one's own home. It does not require any special equipment or training, although women may benefit from learning proper BSE technique from a healthcare provider or through educational materials.

While BSE is an important tool for early detection of breast cancer, it should not be relied upon as the sole method of screening. Women should also receive regular clinical breast exams and mammograms as recommended by their healthcare providers. BSE is a complementary method that can be used in addition to these screenings as an extra measure of precaution.

A Step-by-Step Guide on How to Perform Breast Self-Examination (BSE)

Breast self-examination (BSE) is a simple and effective way for women to monitor their breast health and detect any changes early on. It is recommended that women perform BSE once a month, preferably at the same time each month. Here is a step-by-step guide on how to perform BSE:

Step 1: Get Comfortable

Start by finding a quiet and private place where you can comfortably undress and examine your breasts. You may want to stand in front of a mirror to observe any changes in the size, shape, or color of your breasts.

Step 2: Inspect Your Breasts Visually

Begin by visually inspecting your breasts for any changes. Look for any changes in the skin, nipples, or areolas. Check for any redness, dimpling, or puckering of the skin. Observe any discharge or bleeding from the nipples. These changes could be a sign of breast cancer or other breast conditions.

Step 3: Palpate Your Breasts

Next, use the pads of your fingers to feel your breasts for any lumps or abnormalities. Use a circular motion and cover the entire breast area, including the armpit and collarbone. Pay close attention to any areas that feel different from the rest of the breast tissue, such as lumps or thickening. Remember that breast tissue may feel lumpy or uneven, especially before your period, so it is important to look for changes in texture or size.

Step 4: Check Your Nipples

Finally, check your nipples for any changes. Gently squeeze your nipple to check for any discharge. If you notice any discharge, note the color and consistency, and contact your healthcare provider.

Step 5: Repeat Monthly

Repeat these steps every month, preferably after your period, when your breasts are less likely to be tender or swollen. It is important to perform BSE regularly to become familiar with your breast tissue and to detect any changes early on.

Common Mistakes to Avoid When Performing Breast Self-Examination (BSE)

Breast self-examination (BSE) is an important practice for women to detect any changes in their breast tissue, which could be a sign of breast cancer or other breast conditions. However, many women make mistakes when performing BSE, which can affect the accuracy of the results. Here are some common mistakes to avoid when performing BSE:

Mistake 1: Not Performing BSE Regularly

Performing BSE regularly is key to detecting any changes in breast tissue. Many women forget to perform BSE or don't make it a regular part of their routine. It is recommended that women perform BSE once a month, preferably at the same time each month.

Mistake 2: Not Examining the Entire Breast

Another common mistake when performing BSE is not examining the entire breast. Women may focus only on the areas they feel are lumpy or abnormal, but it is important to examine the entire breast area, including the armpit and collarbone.

Mistake 3: Not Knowing What to Look For

Some women may not know what to look for when performing BSE. It is important to understand the normal look and feel of your breasts, so that you can recognize any changes. Look for any changes in size, shape, color, texture, or any lumps or abnormalities.

Mistake 4: Using Incorrect Technique

Using the incorrect technique when performing BSE can affect the accuracy of the results. Women should use the pads of their fingers, not the tips, and use a circular motion to feel the breast tissue. It is also important to use light, medium, and firm pressure when palpating the breast tissue.

Mistake 5: Not Reporting Changes to a Healthcare Provider

Finally, some women may notice changes in their breast tissue, but may not report them to their healthcare provider. If you notice any changes in your breasts, such as lumps, discharge, or changes in size or shape, contact your healthcare provider right away.

Limitations of Breast Self-Examination (BSE)

Breast self-examination (BSE) is a useful tool for women to detect any changes in their breast tissue, but it is important to understand its limitations. BSE is not a substitute for clinical breast exams or mammograms, which are more effective in detecting breast cancer. Additionally, some studies have questioned the effectiveness of BSE in reducing breast cancer mortality.

Limitation 1: BSE is Not a Substitute for Clinical Breast Exams or Mammograms

While BSE is a useful practice for women to detect any changes in their breast tissue, it is not a substitute for clinical breast exams or mammograms. A clinical breast exam is performed by a healthcare provider and involves a thorough examination of the breast tissue, while mammograms use X-rays to detect any abnormalities in the breast tissue. Both clinical breast exams and mammograms are more effective in detecting breast cancer than BSE.

Limitation 2: Effectiveness of BSE in Reducing Breast Cancer Mortality is Questionable

Some studies have questioned the effectiveness of BSE in reducing breast cancer mortality. A large randomized controlled trial conducted in China found that BSE did not reduce breast cancer mortality rates. Similarly, a meta-analysis of studies on BSE found that while it may increase the detection of breast cancer, it did not significantly reduce breast cancer mortality rates.

Limitation 3: False Positives and False Negatives

Performing BSE can lead to false positives (detecting a lump that is not cancerous) and false negatives (missing a lump that is cancerous). This can cause unnecessary anxiety and additional medical tests for false positives, or a delayed diagnosis and treatment for false negatives.

Limitation 4: Difficulty in Detecting Small Tumors

BSE may not be effective in detecting small tumors, which can be more difficult to detect through palpation. Mammograms are more effective in detecting small tumors and can detect them at an earlier stage.

Controversies Surrounding Breast Self-Examination (BSE)

Breast self-examination (BSE) has been a widely used tool for women to detect any changes in their breast tissue. However, there is some debate over its effectiveness, with some experts advocating for its use and others questioning its value. Some organizations have even stopped recommending BSE altogether.

Controversy 1: Effectiveness of BSE in Detecting Breast Cancer While BSE can help women detect any changes in their breast tissue, there is debate over its effectiveness in detecting breast cancer. Some studies have suggested that BSE can increase the detection of breast cancer, while others have found no significant difference in detection rates between women who perform BSE and those who do not. Additionally, some studies have found that BSE can lead to unnecessary medical tests and anxiety due to false positives.

Controversy 2: Difficulty in Performing BSE Correctly Another controversy surrounding BSE is the difficulty in performing it correctly. Many women make mistakes when performing BSE, such as not examining the entire breast or not knowing what to look for. This can lead to false negatives and delayed diagnoses. Additionally, women may not perform BSE regularly, which can also impact its effectiveness.

Controversy 3: Conflicting Recommendations from Organizations The effectiveness of BSE has been a topic of debate among healthcare organizations as well. Some organizations, such as the American Cancer Society, recommend that women perform BSE, while others, such as the United States Preventive Services Task Force, do not recommend it. This can lead to confusion for women and healthcare providers on the best screening methods for breast cancer.

Controversy 4: Overemphasis on BSE and Underemphasis on Other Screening Methods Finally, there is controversy over the overemphasis on BSE as a screening method for breast cancer, and the underemphasis on other screening methods such as clinical breast exams and mammograms. While BSE can be a useful tool for women to detect any changes in their breast tissue, it is not a substitute for these other screening methods.

Final Thoughts on Breast Self-Examination (BSE)

Breast self-examination (BSE) is a technique that has been promoted for many decades as a method for early detection of breast cancer. While there is some debate over its effectiveness, BSE remains a simple and convenient way for women to become more familiar with their breasts and detect any changes that may indicate breast cancer.

Performing BSE regularly and correctly can help women detect any lumps, changes in size or shape, or any other abnormalities in their breast tissue. It is important to note, however, that BSE is not a substitute for clinical breast exams or mammograms, which are more effective in detecting breast cancer.

To perform BSE correctly, women should ensure they examine the entire breast, including the armpit and collarbone area. Women should also perform BSE at the same time every month and report any abnormalities to their healthcare provider.

Despite some controversy surrounding its effectiveness, BSE remains a valuable tool for women to become more aware of their breast health. It should be used in conjunction with other screening methods, such as clinical breast exams and mammograms, to increase the chances of early detection and successful treatment. Women should consult their healthcare provider for advice on the best screening methods for their individual needs.

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Monthly Breast Self-Exam Guide

Simple steps to help you become familiar with your breasts and notice changes early.



When to do it



-  Once a month
-  A few days after your period ends
-  Choose the same day each month if you do not menstruate.

Step by step

1

Look



In front of a mirror, check for changes in shape, size, skin, or nipples.

2

Raise your arms



Look for changes in shape, size, skin, or nipples.

3

Feel while lying down



Using the pads of your fingers, move in small circles around your breast.

4

Feel while standing or in the shower



Check the area under your arm and around your collarbone.

5

Repeat every month



Consistency helps you know what's normal for you.

What to note



Lumps or thickening



Skin dimpling



Nipple discharge



Persistent pain



Visible changes



Important



Knowing your body helps you notice changes early.



See a healthcare professional if you notice any new or unusual change.



• ♥ Know yourself. Take care of yourself. You matter. ♥ •