

## BREAST CHECK FACTSHEET

### **Q Why is it important to check my breasts?**

**A** Over our lifetime, women have a 1 in 7 chance of being diagnosed with breast cancer, so it is really important to know when to worry and when to get checked out.

### **Q How do I check my breasts – and what am I looking for?**

**A** The NHS Breast Screening Programme has produced a 5-point plan for being breast aware:

- know what's normal for you
- look at your breasts and feel them
- know what changes to look for
- report any changes to a GP without delay
- attend routine screening if you're aged 50 to 70

It is recommended to check your breasts regularly – perhaps once a month.

Most people find it hard to know what is normal when they first check. The best thing to do is to get used to what your breasts look and feel like so that you will know if anything changes.

If you are not able to feel your breasts, you may still be able to do a regular visual check.

### **Q How do I do a visual breast check of my breasts?**

**A** Undress your top half and look in the mirror. Look from the front and then turn and look from each side as well.

Ask yourself:

- Do your breasts look even? One is often larger than the other, but is this normal for you?
- Are the nipples the same on both sides? Has one nipple changed shape or sunk in (inverted) – is this new? Is there any discharge/ bleeding from the nipple or crusting around the nipple?
- Is the skin over the breasts smooth, or is there an area with a rash or irregular skin? Does it pucker in one place?
- Lean forward slightly - do both breasts move the same way, or is one slightly heavier than the other?
- Stretch/ arch your back a little and, if you are able to, raise your shoulders or arms up. Check from the front and each side again – do the breasts move the same on each side? Are there any dimples and puckers. Do the armpits look the same on both sides or is one fuller than the other?

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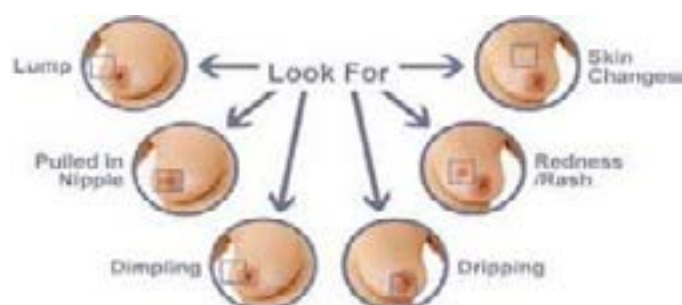


Image courtesy of researchgate.net

### **Q Why is it important to check my breasts?**

**A** Over our lifetime, women have a 1 in 7 chance of being diagnosed with breast cancer, so it is really important to know when to worry and when to get checked out.

### **Q How do I do a physical check of my breasts?**

**A** If you are able to reach your breasts, move on to checking with your palm/ fingers.

It may be easier to do this in the bath or shower with soapy fingers. Run the fingers and hand flat over all the breast tissue and up into the armpit and under the collar bone. Are there any lumpy areas that feel different from normal? Try not to use just your fingertips or poke into the tissue as you will feel ribs that feel lumpy but are not actually breast lumps.

Keep the fingers as flat as you can against the skin and push down gently but firmly as you move around the breast tissue. Try to get into a routine- start at the nipple and work out in a spiral until you reach the armpit.

If you check regularly you will become familiar with what is normal for you and it will be easier to report any changes.

There is a video with BSL Signing of how to check your breasts here: [signhealth.org.uk/videos/breast-cancer-awareness-tlc-2/](https://signhealth.org.uk/videos/breast-cancer-awareness-tlc-2/)

### **Q Is there any support available for people who can't do a physical check themselves?**

**A** Some GP surgeries will support people who are unable to check their own breasts by offering an annual health appointment for this. Unfortunately, this is not available at all GP surgeries.

Some people choose to have a private health check where the doctor can check your breasts for you. You might be offered a mammogram (x-ray of the breast tissue) as well.

Over the age of 50, the UK recommends a mammogram a maximum of once every two years. Ultrasound scans do not use x-rays and can be done more frequently if necessary.

Annual checks should not replace self-checks at home as lumps can develop at any time between appointments and if there is any sign of breast cancer, the sooner it is found the faster it can be treated and is more likely to be curable if found at an early stage.

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### **Q** When should I see a GP?

**A** Over our lifetime, women have a 1 in 7 chance of being diagnosed with breast cancer, so it is really important to know when to worry and when to get checked out.

See a GP urgently if you notice any of the following changes:

- a change in the size, outline, heaviness or shape of your breast
- a change in the look or feel of the skin on your breast, such as puckering or dimpling, a rash or redness
- a new lump, swelling, thickening or bumpy area in one breast or armpit that was not there before or fullness in the armpit on looking in the mirror
- discharge from a nipple or crusting around the nipple.
- any change in nipple position, such as your nipple being pulled in or pointing differently
- a rash (like eczema), crusting, scaly or itchy skin or redness on or around your nipple or over the breast
- any discomfort or pain in one breast, particularly if it's a new pain and does not go away (although pain is only a symptom of breast cancer in rare cases).

When you call for an appointment, the receptionist may ask what it is about. Be sure to tell them you have breast changes that you are concerned could be cancer. They should offer you an appointment within a few days- possibly the same day you call.

If you have any problems getting an appointment with your GP, please call the Trust and ask to speak to one of the medical advisers.

Definitely go for your three yearly mammogram. These will be offered until you are 70 but you can continue to request a mammogram every three years after the age of 70 by calling your local unit. Your GP surgery reception team will have the number.

### **Q** Where can I find out more?

**A** If you have other questions you can arrange to speak to one of the Trust's Medical Advisers. Call us on 01480 474074 or email [hello@thalidomidetrust.org](mailto:hello@thalidomidetrust.org)