



Simple Breast Exams Every Woman Should Do At Home

It will bring peace of mind.
By Deboshree Bhattacharjee

I lost my mom to breast cancer. Her cancer went undetected till it had reached stage III, and she had a particularly resilient form of the disease. For three years after her first diagnosis, our lives were a series of hospital appointments, blood tests, impulsive vacations, stolen moments, hopes, tears...and nightmares. Until our nightmares became a reality. It has been four years since I lost her, but it seems like yesterday when the two of us were eating pizzas and celebrating the fact that her scans had come out clear.

It will all be well, we told each other. Breast cancer does not kill. Breast cancer definitely does not kill people as young as my mom. Except that it does, and it did.

I have accepted that I will forever live with a massive void in my heart. However, the tragedy has alerted me to a fatal mistake I made as a daughter - not taking my mother for a mammography way before. Way before we got that dreadful diagnosis. If only we had detected her cancer when she was still in stage I, she might have been by my side today. And, turns out, there are

several ways to get alerted of a problem even without doing a mammography.

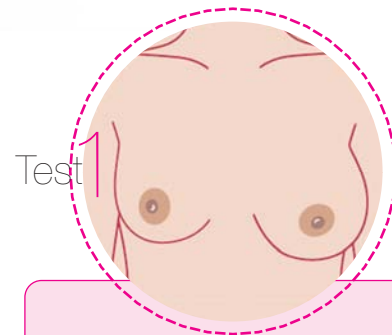
All we need to do is a periodic breast examination at home. According to doctors, every woman over the age of 30 should regularly check her breasts. This daily check-up is not to ferret out a problem but to ensure everything is normal and, if something isn't, to deal with it early.

I am sharing six simple breast exams that you should do periodically.

When: At least once a month. They can be done after your shower, or when you are getting dressed. It is recommended to do these tests a few days after your period ends.

How to

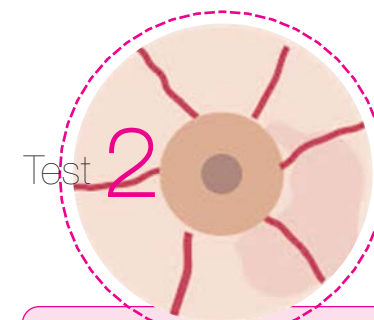
- ✿ Put one arm over your head.
- ✿ Using your other hand, massage your fingers over your breasts in a circular motion.
- ✿ Start at the nipple and glide your hands to the top of the breast.
- ✿ Swap your hands and do this for both breasts.



Test 1: Do your breasts seem to have changed in size, colour, shape or symmetry?

Do you think that one breast suddenly seems to look larger or lower than the other? Do your breasts look red or inflamed? This can be one of the early signs of breast cancer.

Note: Many women tend to have one breast larger than the other. Experts believe that this can be traced to puberty, when one breast may have reacted differently to the surging oestrogen levels (female sex hormone). So, if your breasts have always been a little asymmetrical, there is nothing to worry. You need to be cautious of anything that changes.



Test 2: Is there dimpling on your breasts?

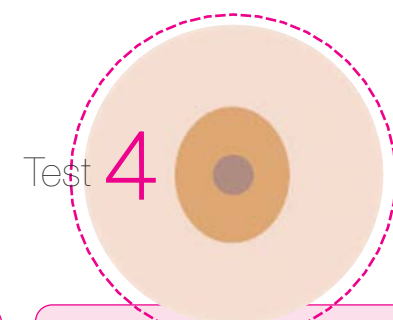
Does the texture of your breast seem unusual? Can you see a dimple, puckering, or unevenness in the surface of your breast? Does it look or feel like an orange peel?

Sometimes, dimpling is the result of fat necrosis (damage to the fatty tissue in your breast), and this is unrelated to cancer. However, dimpling could also indicate inflammatory breast cancer that blocks the lymph vessels in your skin.



Test 3: Do your nipples look inverted?

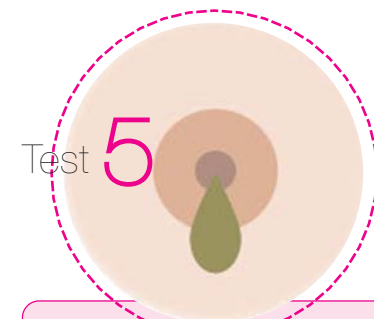
Do your nipples seem to be pushed inwards instead of sticking out as usual? Sometimes, this can happen due to trauma or a breast abscess. However, nipple retraction can also happen when a cancerous tumour attacks the duct behind the nipple and pulls it in (making it inverted).



Test 4: Can you feel a lump in your breast?

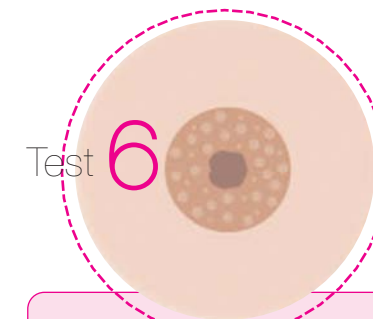
This is perhaps the most obvious, and most distressing test for breast cancer. Do you feel something hard, uneven and movable in your breasts?

Note: A lump is more likely to be cancerous if it is painless. Painful lumps are usually caused by infections like mastitis.



Test 5: Is there discharge from your nipples?

Do you see any nipple discharge such as milk, water, blood, yellowish fluid, greenish fluid, etc? If you are not breastfeeding, sudden nipple discharge can indicate a concern. It could be something mild, such as an infection, hypothyroidism, or a side effect of some medications. But it could also be cancer. Intraductal breast cancer (cancer that develops within the ducts of the breast) has been known to cause nipple discharge.



Test 6: Is there a rash, redness, swelling or crusting in your breasts/nipples?

Some rashes could simply be caused by a skin-unfriendly detergent or an ill-fitting bra. However, if you frequently spot these problems in your breast area, do not ignore them.

What to do next

If the results of any of the above tests worry you, see your doctor without delay. It is quite likely that what you are experiencing could be because of an infection, an underlying illness, or a non-cancerous lump/tumour. However, the sooner it is tackled, the easier

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your mind can rest. A standard mammography is a fairly affordable procedure and will cost you around 1200-1500 INR. Breast cancer remains highly treatable when detected in the early stages. By performing these tests regularly, you may be earning the gift of life for yourself and your loved ones.

Disclaimer: This post is based on my personal observations and discussions with doctors, and is not a substitute for medical opinion. If you suspect anything amiss, I'd strongly recommend that you consult your doctor for a check-up.