

WHAT IS BREAST AWARENESS?

Breast awareness is a part of general body awareness. It is a process of getting to know your own breasts and becoming familiar with their appearance. Learning how your breasts feel at different times will help you to know what is normal for you.

You can become familiar with your breast tissue by looking and feeling – in any way that is best for you (e.g. in the bath, shower, when dressing).

Being **breast aware** and knowing what is normal for you will help you to be aware of any changes from normal, should these happen.

**Take care of your
own well-being**

THE NORMAL BREAST

Before the menopause normal breasts feel different at different times of the month. The milk-producing tissue in the breast becomes active in the days before a period starts. In some women, the breast at this time feel tender and lumpy, especially near the armpits.

After a hysterectomy the breasts usually show the same monthly differences until the time when your periods would have stopped.

After the menopause activity in the milk-producing tissue stops. Normal breasts feel soft, less firm and not lumpy.

**Know what is
normal for you**

CHANGES TO LOOK OUT FOR

Appearance. Any change in the outline or shape of the breast, especially those caused by arm movements, or by lifting the breasts. Any puckering or dimpling of the skin.

Feelings. Discomfort or pain in one breast that is different from normal, particularly if new and persistent.

Lumps. Any lumps, thickening or bumpy areas in one breast or armpit which seem to be different from the same part of the other breast and armpit. This is very important if new.

Nipple change. Nipple discharge, new for you and not milky. Bleeding or moist reddish areas which don't heal easily. Any change in nipple position – pulled in or pointing differently. A nipple rash on or around the nipple.

**Know what to look
and feel for**

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A CHANGE

There can be many reasons for changes in the breast. Most of them are harmless but all of them need to be checked as there is a small chance they could be the first sign of cancer.

If you are aware of any change in your breast from what is normal for you, **tell your doctor without delay**. Remember, you are not wasting anyone's time. If there is a cancer present, the sooner it is reported, the more simple treatment is likely to be. This offers greater prospects of benefit in terms of quality of life.

Breast cancer is very rare in women under the age of 40. The likelihood of developing breast cancer increases with age.

**Report any
changes
without delay**

BREAST SCREENING

If you are aged 50 and over it is strongly recommended that you take advantage of the National Health Service Breast Screening Programme which offers three-yearly mammography. This is an X-ray procedure which can detect breast changes at a very early stage. For more information about the Breast Screening Programme ask your doctor.

Routine X-ray breast screening is not available for women under 50 as it has not been shown to be of benefit. If you have any cause for concern about your breasts tell your doctor.

BREAST AWARENESS FIVE-POINT CODE

- Know what is normal *for you*
- Look and feel
- Know what changes to look for
- Report any changes *without delay*
- Attend for breast screening if aged 50 or over

If you require further copies of this leaflet quote 25970/Be breast aware and contact:
Department of Health Publications, PO Box 777, London SE1 6XH
Tel: 08071 555 455
Fax: 01623 724524
E-mail: doh@prolog.uk.com

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NHS Cancer Screening Programmes

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