

## **Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template**

**Title:** Self breast-exam: A good or a potential harm?

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### **Plain Language Summary:**

Breast cancer is an uncontrolled growth of cells in the breast tissue. These cells have undergone changes that allow them to reproduce faster than normal cells and are also resistant to death. This becomes a problem when these cells begin to grow into parts of the body where they are not supposed to grow and interfere with normal functions of organs in the body. Breast cancer is a cancer that starts from the breast tissue. There are two main types: 1) Ductal carcinoma that starts in the tubes that move milk from the breast to the nipple and 2) Lobular carcinoma that starts in the part of the breast that produces milk. Breast cancer is much more common in women although on rare occasions can be found in men as well. Risk factors include age, gender, family history, BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, puberty at an early age, late menopause, alcohol use, and exposure to radiation.

Breast cancer screening can help find cancer before a person has any noticeable signs or symptoms. The goal of screening is to find cancer at an earlier stage and may improve prognosis. Currently there are two screening tests for breast cancer. Mammograms, which are currently recommended every two years for women over 50, use X-rays to examine the breast. The second screening test is the clinical breast exam and is recommended every 3 years for women starting at age 20 until age 40. Your doctor will examine the skin of the breast for any changes and then examine the breast itself for any bumps or changes that might be suspicious for cancer.

It was previously recommended that women should be taught a similar exam by their doctor and practice it at home on a monthly basis. This was called the self breast-exam. The self breast-exam is no longer recommended as it was not found to decrease the risk of death from breast cancer and actually increased the risk of potential harms through increased patient anxiety, more additional imaging, and more breast biopsies. Now, experts recommend breast self-awareness in place of the self breast-exam. Self breast-awareness focuses on recognizing the normal appearance and feeling of your breasts. If you notice any changes you should report this to your primary doctor immediately who can help you to determine the best way to proceed.

### **Additional Resources:**

#### **For more information:**

National Cancer Institute

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/breast>

Medline Plus:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/breastcancer.html>

Susan G. Komen for the Cure:

<http://ww5.komen.org/BreastCancer/Breastselfawareness.html>

and

<http://ww5.komen.org/BreastCancer/UnderstandingBreastCancer.html>

#### **For support, treatment, and other resources:**

[http://www.breastcancer.org/treatment/comp\\_med/types/group.jsp](http://www.breastcancer.org/treatment/comp_med/types/group.jsp)

<http://bcsupport.org/>

### **Key Words:**

Breast Cancer

Cancer Screening

Breast self-exam

Breast self-awareness

Mammogram

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