

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: Self-Breast Examinations Are Not Recommended

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Plain Language Summary:

Reasons To Not Do A Self Breast Exam:

Performing a breast exam on yourself is not recommended, it does not increase the chance of finding a cancer or increase the survival rate from cancer. When people do self breast exams, more lumps are found which are not cancer and are removed by a surgeon. Removing these lumps does not prevent cancer and the removal of these lumps is not suggested and not needed.

What Should Be Done:

Women should be aware of their breasts and pay attention to any changes, but a self breast exam is not needed. You should see your doctor if you notice any of the following: fluid coming out of the nipples, your nipple is pointing inward (inverted), the skin on your breast is scaly, swollen or red, or if shape or size of your breast change.

If you do notice a lump it is most likely not cancer, but it should still be discussed with your doctor. Although you do not need to do a breast exam on yourself, your doctor may do one each year on you to make sure he or she does not find any changes in your breasts. Your doctor will also discuss having a mammogram with you.

When talking with your doctor, make sure that you share with him if anyone in your family has or had breast cancer or any other types of cancer. If so, your doctor will also want to know how old they were when they had the cancer and their outcome.

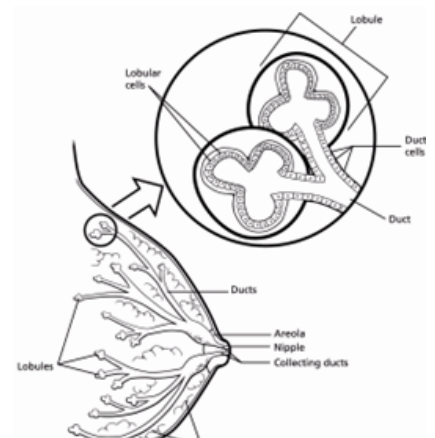
Mammogram:

A mammogram, also known as mammography, is an x-ray of your breasts which can find cancer and other lumps in your breast. It can find these even in people who show no signs of cancer. After having this test done your doctor will contact you with the results.

You should get a mammogram based on your doctor's recommendations. Current recommendations are that every women 40 years old and older should have one done every 1 to 2 years. Women who are at higher risk, such as those with a history of breast cancer in their family, should talk to their doctors to see if they should have one done early or more often.

What is Breast Cancer:

Breast cancer is when the cells in your breast change and then they continue to grow and do not die as they should. When



cancer occurs, it usually starts in the tubes that carry milk to the nipple (ducts) or the glands that make milk (lobules). Breast cancer is the second most common type of cancer in women besides skin cancer. Breast cancer is the leading cause of death in women, behind lung cancer. It is important to note that men can get breast cancer although the chances are very slim.

Additional Resources:

American Cancer Society –

<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/index> (understanding breast cancer)

1-800- 227-2345

National Cancer Institute –

<http://www.cancer.gov/newscenter/qa/2009/breastscreenqa> (breast screening)
<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/screening/understanding-breast-changes>

(breast changes to look for)

1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

US National Library of Health –

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001911/>

BreastCancer.org –

<http://www.breastcancer.org/> (connecting with those who have or know people who have breast cancer)

Fairview –

<http://www.fairview.org/Services/CancerCare/BreastCancer/index.htm>

Key Words:

Breast Cancer

Breast Cancer Screening

Self-Breast Exams

Mammogram

Breast Cancer Prevention

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