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United Nations Joint Medical Service

UNIPSIL, Freetown, Sierra Leone

BREAST CANCER AND BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION

Breast cancer is the number one killer of women between 35 and 55 years. In developing countries, studies have shown that younger women are more affected.

Risk factors

- Being female
- Women without children, or who have never breastfed
- Higher hormone levels and exposure through OCs, hormone replacement therapy for menopause
- Irradiation therapy
- Caucasians
- Smoking and alcohol consumption
- Obesity

Symptoms

- Breast lump (80%)
- Changes in breast size or shape
- Breast skin dimpling or orange peel texture

- Nipple inversion
- Spontaneous unilateral nipple discharge
- Breast pain, swelling, warmth or redness

Diagnosis

- Self breast examination
- Clinical breast examination
- Breast ultrasound
- Mammography
- Tissue biopsies

Treatment

This will depend on the disease staging, the earlier the diagnosis, the better the treatment outcome.

- Surgery – lumpectomy, quadrantectomies, myomectomy
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy

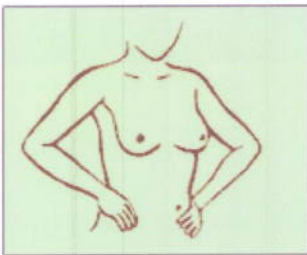
Screening for breast cancer

The most effective screening method is breast self examination because it enhances early cancer detection. Therefore all women from puberty should learn how to do BSE. This must be carried out once every month during monthly periods or on the first date of every month for those without MP or in menopause.

Five basic steps of SBE

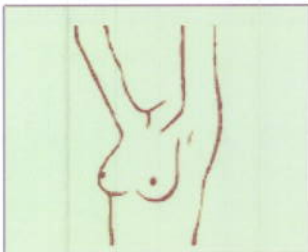
Step 1

Standing, shoulders straight and arms on your hips, face a mirror. Look for any differences in size, shape, color, swelling, or skin texture, changes in nipple, or any signs of redness/rash



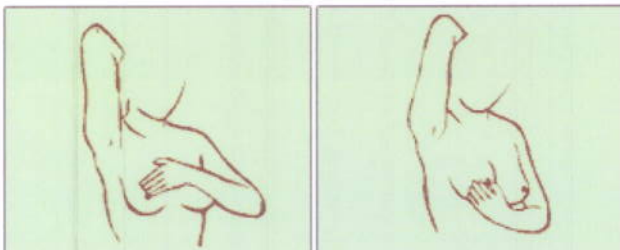
Step 2

Raise your arms, and examine your breasts for any of those changes



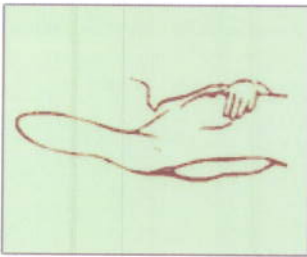
Step 3

Gently squeeze each nipple to check for discharge



Step 4

Lie down and feel each breast with the opposite hand. Feel all the tissue in a methodical manner to cover all areas of each breast, applying pressure to check deep tissue for any lumps or abnormalities.



Step 5

Examine both breasts while standing and sitting and gently examine the entire breast. You may want to try this method in the shower, while the skin is slippery. Clinical breast examination is part of every woman's routine checkup. This must be done by a doctor once a year. Women of age 40 and above should have a mammogram once a year as part of their annual checkups.

