

EDUCATOR RESOURCES



Responding to Questions About Breast Self-Exam

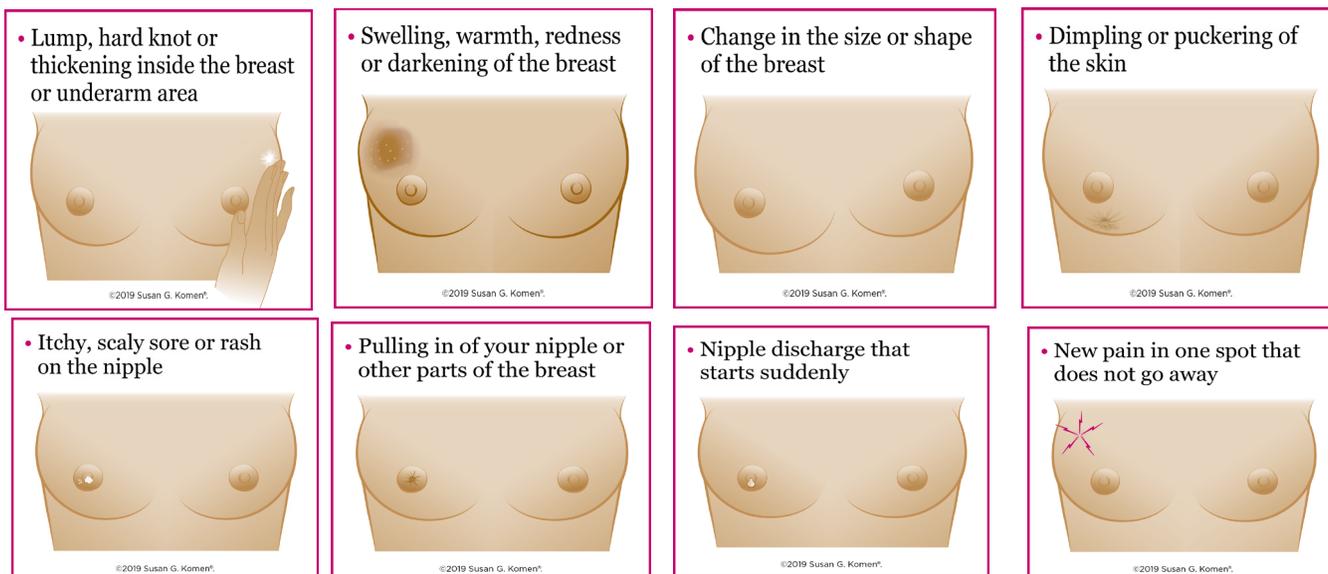
Many people ask about the difference between Breast Self-Awareness and Breast Self-Exams. This educator resource contains information that you can use if the topic is brought up in your group or one-to-one conversations. It is not recommended that you purposely begin a discussion about this topic because of the complexity of, and time it may take to explain these differences.

Most organizations no longer recommend monthly breast self-exams because studies show that that it does not reduce mortality (death). Women knew they should be doing self-exams, but didn't actually do it and sometimes felt guilty about not doing it. Additionally, when the steps of the self-exam were taught, there was often more emphasis on the actual steps themselves, than on being able to recognize the changes (warning signs) someone should notice and report to a health care provider. The use of breast models as a teaching tool are also not recommended. There was more emphasis on feeling for lumps and little emphasis on the visual (looking) inspection. The visual inspection is important because six of the eight warning signs are visual.

Today, we encourage breast self-awareness that includes a woman's knowledge of risk factors, how her breasts normally look and feel, actions she can take to reduce risk, understanding of the importance of recommended screenings and communicating about changes in her breasts to a health care provider.

If someone you meet asks you about breast self-exams, you can share breast self-awareness educational materials (available from [komen.org](https://www.komen.org)) and the following information:

- We recommend that women know what is normal for them regarding their breasts, just like they do their faces, legs, arms, etc. — by familiarity and awareness.
- We prefer to focus on making sure women know the warning signs of breast cancer — and feel empowered to see a health care provider if they notice a change in their breast. Six of those eight warning sign are visual.



If someone you meet says that they found their own breast cancer through breast self-exam:

- Acknowledge and congratulate that they knew what was normal for them, recognized a change and took action to have it evaluated.
- Share that many women who discover changes in their breast that turn out to be breast cancer don't actually discover them on the day and time they have set aside for monthly breast self-exam, but rather noticed a change at some other time, such as when showering or dressing, and recognized the change because they knew what was normal for them.

The [Educational Materials](#) page includes a variety of breast self-awareness materials, including print materials for distribution and a PowerPoint presentation in English and Spanish entitled, [Breast Self-Awareness for Hispanic/Latino Communities](#) that includes talking points that can be customized and adapted depending on your audience.