

EDUCATOR RESOURCES



Responding to Questions About Breast Self-Exam (BSE)

Today, we encourage women to know their risk of developing breast cancer; get screened; know how their breasts normally look and feel and the importance of reporting changes to a health care provider; and to make healthy lifestyle choices that may reduce their risk. We refer to this more comprehensive set of educational messages as *breast self-awareness messages*. Each message is associated with actions that women can take to make informed breast care decisions.

BSE involves learning a series of steps to look and feel the breast and breast area for changes. Women were advised to perform breast self-exam at the same time each month. Many organizations, including Komen, no longer teach the specific steps of BSE, but prefer to focus on the warning signs of breast cancer that all women should know and report to their providers when a change is noticed.

Sometimes people ask about the difference between breast self-awareness and BSE. 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.

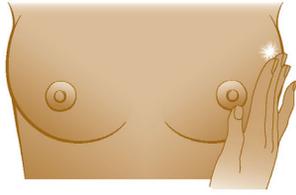
Most organizations no longer teach monthly BSE for the following reasons:

- Studies show that teaching BSE does not reduce mortality (death).
- In the past, women knew they should be doing breast self-exams, but didn't actually do them and sometimes felt guilty about not doing them.
- When the steps of the breast self-exam were taught, there was often more emphasis on the actual steps themselves, than on being able to recognize the changes (warning signs) important for people to notice and report to a health care provider.
- The use of breast models as a teaching tool is 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.

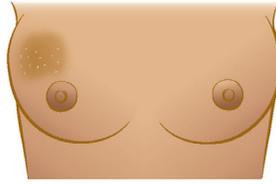
If someone you meet asks you about BSE you can share [breast self-awareness messages card](#) and the following information:

- 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 signs are visual.

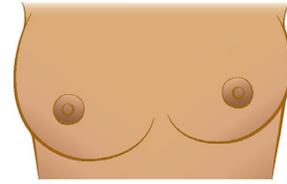
- Lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast or underarm area



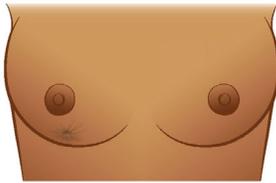
- Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast



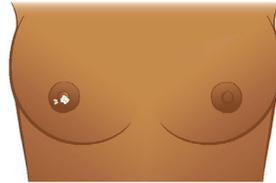
- Change in the size or shape of the breast



- Dimpling or puckering of the skin



- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple



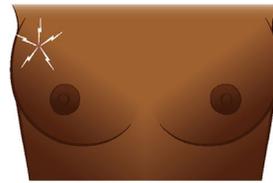
- Pulling in of your nipple or other parts of the breast



- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly



- New pain in one spot that does not go away



©2020 Susan G. Komen®

If someone you meet says that they found their own breast cancer through BSE:

- Acknowledge and congratulate that they knew what was normal for them, recognized a change and took action to have it checked.
- 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 BSE, 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 entitled, Breast Self Awareness for Black and African American Communities that includes talking points that can be customized and adapted depending on your audience.