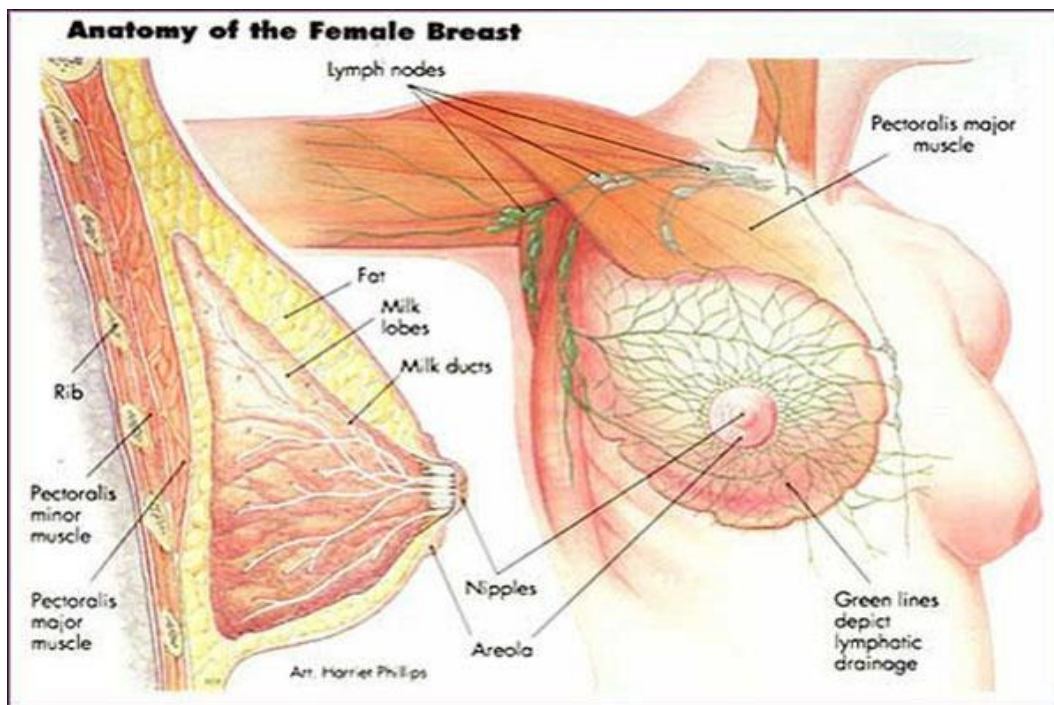


THE BREAST.



The breast is mainly formed by lobules (the units where milk is produced) and ducts that transport milk to the nipple. The stroma is composed predominantly of a dense fibrous connective and fat tissue. Under normal conditions, the female breast undergoes cyclical changes such as tenderness or lumpiness, related to hormonal variations of the menstrual cycle. Breast tissue also changes as you age, typically becoming more fatty and less dense.

Breasts contain tissues of varying consistency. The glandular tissue in the upper, outer part of the breast usually feels slightly rope-like, bumpy or lumpy (nodular). The surrounding fat tissue, often felt in the inner and lower parts of the breast, is soft and less nodular or lumpy than the upper, outer breast.



If you find a breast lump or other change in your breast, you should have it evaluated by a doctor, especially if it's new and feels different from surrounding breast tissue. However, it's important to note that breast lumps are common. Most often they're *noncancerous (benign)*, particularly in younger women but they vary in their tendency to become *cancerous (malignant)*.

Causes of breast lumps

- Infections such as mastitis and cellulitis
- Injuries (accidental trauma, biopsy removal)
- Non-cancerous growths
- Cancer.

Common types of **benign (non-cancerous) breast lumps** include:-

- **Breast cyst** – a smooth, firm fluid-filled lump mostly seen in women aged 30 to 60 commonly caused by blocked ducts in the breast creating a small, fluid-filled sac.
- **Breast abscess**– a painful collection of pus that forms under the skin of the breast, usually as the result of a bacterial infection.
- **Lipoma** – a benign tumour of fat cells that can occur anywhere in the body. They are common and generally soft and painless.
- **Fibrocystic changes** are characterized by breasts that are lumpy with many irregularities in the breast that feel almost grainy. Fibrocystic breasts seem to occur because a woman's breasts are extra sensitive to fluctuating hormone levels. Women with fibrocystic changes may have pain and/or lumps.

Some benign breast diseases are not themselves cancerous but can carry a **slight increase in the risk of breast cancer** in the future. The level of this risk depends on the patient's medical and family history. These include:

- **Fibroadenomas** – areas of overgrowth of normal breast tissue due to hormonal stimulation that are common in younger women. They are generally painless, soft and mobile. They are removed if larger than 2 cm, growing rapidly, or causing distress to the patient.
- **Intraductal papilloma** – benign tumours of the tissue lining milk ducts in the breast. They can be single or multiple and can cause a discharge of fluid from the nipple. They are most commonly seen in women aged 30 to 50 years.
- **Tubular adenomas** – benign tumours of cells of breast glands, they are rare but most common in younger women.
- **Phyllodes tumour** – rare tumours of breast tissue that can be difficult to diagnose. They appear similar to fibroadenomas but have a greater tendency to recur. Rarely, a Phyllodes tumour can be cancerous and spread to distant tissues and are therefore surgically removed if diagnosed.

Benign breast lumps do not necessarily require any treatment, although treatment may be recommended if the lump is particularly large, is getting bigger, or is causing other symptoms such as pain.

Pain medication can often help relieve breast pain, and antibiotics can treat any bacterial infections that may have caused the lump to develop. In some cases, a needle may need to be used to drain away any fluid or pus within the breast lump under local anesthesia. Occasionally, surgery may be carried out to cut out the lump under general anesthesia.

Early diagnosis is key in proper management and prognosis of breast lumps. It is therefore advisable to perform **Breast Self-Examination** and a **Clinical Breast Examination**.

Clinical Breast Exam (CBE) is performed by a doctor or nurse:-

- Every six months for women over the age 35.
 - Every 3 years for women between the ages of 20 and 39.
- All women over 20 should do breast self- examination (BSE) every month.

Breast Self-Examination (BSE)

When you get to know how your breasts normally feel, you will quickly be able to feel any change and early detection is the key to successful treatment. A breast self-exam could save your breast and your life.

Remember, 9 out of every 10 breast lumps found are *not* cancerous.

When to do a Breast Self- Exam

- A week after your period when the breasts are not swollen or tender.
- The same date every month for menopausal and pregnant women.
- It is recommended from the age of 20 and should continue monthly



Step 1: Begin by looking at your breasts in the mirror with your shoulders straight, your arms on your hips and tighten your chest muscles. Look at the size, shape, and color and for any dimpling, puckering, or bulging of the skin, inverted nipple, redness, soreness, rash, or swelling.



Step 2: Raise your arms and look for the same changes.

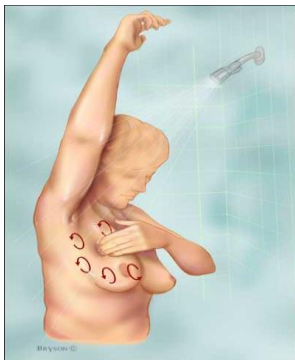
Step 3: While you're at the mirror, look for any signs of fluid coming out of one or both nipples (this could be a watery, milky, or yellow fluid or blood).



Step 4: Feel your breasts while lying down, using your right hand to feel your left breast and vice versa. Use a firm, smooth touch with the first few finger pads of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together moving in a circular motion.

You can begin at the nipple, moving in larger and larger circles until you reach the outer edge of the breast. You can also move your fingers up and down vertically, in rows.

Feel all the tissue from the front to the back of your breasts: for the skin and tissue just beneath, use light pressure; use medium pressure for tissue in the middle of your breasts; use firm pressure for the deep tissue in the back.



Step 5: Finally, feel your breasts while you are standing or sitting. It is easier to feel the breasts when the skin is wet and slippery therefore this step can be done in the shower. Cover your entire breast, using the same hand movements described in step 4.

Conclusion

- Report any abnormality you notice in the breast to your health provider. It could be cancer!
- Do a self-breast examination monthly a week after your periods
- If reported early the chances of complete cure of breast cancer is higher
- You are not alone, talk to others about breast cancer.