

**The AEEU's breast awareness information is produced in partnership with the Women's Nationwide Cancer Control Campaign (WNCCC)**

Founded in 1965, the WNCCC is a charity dedicated to promoting the prevention and early detection of cancer in women.

**WNCCC focuses on:**

- the need to make women aware of signs that might indicate early cancers
- the need for information regarding breast and cervical cancer screening
- the need for women distressed by or seeking information, to have support and advice.

**WNCCC does this through:**

- information and health promotion service
- screening service
- helpline service

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# breast awareness

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# breast awareness makes sense

Breast awareness means knowing your breasts and being aware of what is normal for you at all times in your monthly cycle. When you know how your breasts normally look and feel, you will be the first to notice any changes.

Most changes are harmless but should be checked by a doctor. A change is seldom due to cancer but even if it is, early detection may mean simpler and usually more successful treatment.

## When should I check?

This is up to you but you have probably noticed that your breasts change during your monthly cycle. Many women have lumpy, tender breasts just before their period and soft breasts immediately afterwards.

Although it will be easier to make comparisons when the breasts are soft, it is wise to be aware of the changes throughout your cycle. After the menopause breasts feel soft and less lumpy.

## What should I check for?

Remember you are looking for any change in your breasts which is unusual *for you*.

The first time you check your breasts notice their normal shape and size. It is not unusual for one breast to be larger than the other. Notice the normal appearance and position of your nipples and the normal 'feel' of your breasts.

## Changes to look for

- change in size
- change in outline (any flattening)
- any obvious lumps or thickening
- puckering or dimpling of the skin
- veins which stand out more than usual
- any change in the position of the nipple – pulled in or pointing to the side
- rash around the nipple
- blood or discharge from the nipple. (Some women can always produce a little clear or milky fluid which is normal for them)
- any change in sensation – particularly if new and one sided
- anything that is new for you and is not felt in the other breast

***Your practice nurse should be able to help you to become breast aware.***

## By looking

When preparing for a bath or shower stand in front of a mirror with your arms to your sides and look at each breast in turn

Raise your arms above your head and look again.

Raise your hands on your hips and then press inwards until your chest muscles tighten.

Look carefully at your breasts from every angle – from the sides – underneath – lean forwards and look at the shape of your breasts.

## By feeling

Do this in the bath or shower with a soapy hand which will slide easily over the breast. For women with larger breasts it may be easier when lying on the bed.

Do not squeeze or prod your breasts. Keep the fingers together and use them flat. Press the breast gently but firmly by moving your fingers over the whole breast. It is easier to use the right hand to feel the left breast and vice versa.

Remember your breasts are pear shaped with the point of the breast going into the armpit. Feel every part of the breasts including up towards the collar bone, into the armpit and behind the nipple.

## If there is any change or anything new

If you find any changes seek medical advice. Most breast changes are not caused by cancer but are due to simple cysts or lumps which can be treated easily. The only certain way to know what is causing the problem is to make an appointment to see your doctor who will decide what should be done. Even if you have breast cancer early detection and prompt treatment give the best results.

## Women aged 50-64 years

Don't miss your chance to have a free mammogram [breast x-ray]. Make sure you accept your three-yearly invitation from the NHS Breast Screening Programme. Don't forget to be breast aware between mammograms.

## Women over 64 years

At present, in most areas you will not receive an invitation for screening, so you must request your free mammogram [breast x-ray]. See your GP or contact your local NHS Breast Screening Programme Office.

## Women under 50 years

You are not included in the NHS Breast Screening Programme. If you have any reason to be concerned about your breasts – **see your doctor.**