

Raising awareness: Do-it-yourself breast exam

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Jamaican women. It is estimated that one out of every eight women will develop the disease therefore a monthly breast self exam is vital for every woman.

Performing a monthly breast self examination may aid in early detection of breast cancer. The self examination is quite easy to do and takes 10 to 15 minutes. Your tools are your fingers, a pillow and mirror.

Steps:

1. Lay down and place a pillow under your right shoulder. Next, place your right arm under your head.
2. Using your three middle fingers of your left hand, massage your right breast with the pads of your fingers. Check for any lumps or abnormalities. You can move in a circular motion, or up and down. Make sure you use the same motion every month.
3. Continue the motion, extending to the outside of the breast to your underarm.
4. Repeat on left side.
5. Next, repeat exam standing up, with one arm behind your shoulder as you examine each breast. Standing or sitting up allows you to feel the outside of the breast more accurately.
6. For added precaution, stand in front of a mirror and squeeze each nipple. Look for any discharge.
7. Take note of any dimpling, redness or swelling.

Tips:

Do a portion of the exam while you are in shower as a normal activity which can make it easier to do, and less of a time constraint. Remember to mark your calendar every month as a reminder.

Do the self breast exam every month at the same time. Menstruating women should perform it a few days after their period. Women taking oral contraceptives should do the exam on the first day of starting a new pack of pills.

Report any changes to your physician, even if you feel it is minor.

Remember ... early detection can save your life!

Do it today!