

Mammography and Examinations by a Physician

Breast cancer affects as many women in their forties as it does women fifty and over. As a result, the American Cancer Society has revised its screening guidelines. The current recommendations are:

Yearly mammograms are recommended starting at age 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health.

Women at high risk should get an MRI and a mammogram every year. Women at moderately increased risk would benefit with a breast ultrasound exam in addition to their yearly mammogram if they have a dense mammographic pattern.

KCBC
Knoxville Comprehensive Breast Center



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KCBC'S

**BREAST
HEALTH
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**FIBROCYSTIC
CHANGES**

Knoxville Comprehensive Breast Center
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*The breast health specialists
for over thirty years*

The Knoxville Comprehensive Breast Center Breast Health Library has been designed to give you more information about breast health issues. If you have additional questions after you read this brochure, please be sure to ask a Breast Health Nurse Specialist.

FIBROCYSTIC CHANGES

Fibrocystic changes, a term used by physicians and pathologists, describes a number of noncancerous conditions occurring in the breasts. Previously, the term “fibrocystic disease” was used to describe the process and was falsely implicated as a risk factor for cancer. However, all women have lumpy breasts on breast self exam (BSE). Furthermore, studies have shown that most women have microscopic fibrocystic changes.

These changes are a normal response to the hormonal stimulation of the breast tissue and **do not represent a “disease” process**. Thus, the term “fibrocystic disease” is not an accurate description of the changes. Fibrocystic changes do not increase the risk for cancer. The term is commonly applied to any change that is not cancerous.

Breast Lumpiness

The breasts are very complex glandular organs that consist of 15 to 20 lobes that radiate from the nipples. These lobes further divide into 20 to 40 lobules that contain 10 to 100 alveoli where the milk or fluid is produced in the breast.

This whole glandular structure is changing constantly because of the stimulation of estrogen and progesterone hormones on the breast tissue. When the stimulation begins after the menstrual period, the breasts respond by beginning to fill with fluid. Each breast will produce and store between 15 to 30 cc’s (3 to 6 teaspoons) of fluid in the ducts during the month. This causes a feeling of heaviness, especially right before a menstrual period. The hormonal influence also causes extra layers of cells to be produced in the ducts. The combination of these causes an increase in the size of the breasts, increased lumpiness and possibly tenderness or pain.

Some drugs routinely prescribed by a physician can cause some women to experience increased lumpiness, fullness, and tenderness in the breast tissues. This type of change feels very similar to those produced by hormonal changes in the body. These changes are not harmful but can raise suspicions of something abnormal occurring in your breast.

Examples are:

Blood pressure medications

Heart medication

Antipsychotic/antinausea drugs

When you check your breasts before your menstrual period, they will feel differently than at the end of your period. Therefore, it is very important to examine your breasts on a regular basis at the **same** time of the month; the best time is one week

after your period. If you find a lump in the breast, feel the opposite breast in the same area for a similar change. If one is found, you probably have discovered a normal hormonal change. It is safe to wait and go through a menstrual period and re-check the same area. If the area is smaller or softer at your second self-exam, then it was likely related to hormonal changes that are normal. If the lump has not become softer or smaller, a physician will need to evaluate the area. Every woman has their own unique pattern of lumpiness and bumpiness in her breast tissues which is normal. Only through regular self-exams can a woman get to know this pattern of lumpiness in her own breasts. A physician examining the breasts once a year will **not** be able to learn your individual pattern of breast lumpiness.

Breast Discharge

Some women experience a clear to milky color discharge from their breasts right before the start of their monthly cycle or at the beginning of their menstrual period. This type of discharge is not unusual. It may also be noticed after sexual stimulation or when women begin taking hormone supplements. An occasional small amount of discharge from both breasts is not abnormal. However, if this discharge continues throughout the month and comes from only one breast, or has any evidence of blood, contact your physician.