

FEMALE BODY: AN OWNER'S MANUAL

Women's bodies are special and deserve respect.



No matter what your age, shape, size, ethnic or racial background, religion, sexual orientation, and education level, EVERY woman needs to look after this precious resource: her unique female body with its distinctive reproductive function and structure. Female anatomy and physical events are shared experiences for all women.

Be Breast Aware

All women over 18 years old should perform a monthly breast self-exam (BSE). Hormonal fluctuations may cause lumpiness and tenderness just before and during your period. For a more reliable BSE, examine your breasts the week after your period finishes.

- BSEs help you to know the normal look and feel of your breasts and to detect changes early.
- 18 to 40 years old: Have a clinical breast exam performed by your practitioner every year.
- Over 40 years old: Have yearly clinical breast exams and annual mammograms.
- Women at higher risk for breast cancer, such as smokers or women with a strong family history = 2 or more close female relatives (mother, sister, aunt) with breast or ovarian cancer, should discuss their screening needs with their physician.
- Most breast changes do NOT = breast cancer. Innocent conditions such as cysts, fibrous lumps, and calcium deposits may cause changes and should be reported to your doctor promptly, pay special attention to:
 - A lump or lumpiness especially if in one breast
 - Change in size or shape of breast or nipple
 - Discharge from the nipple
 - Change in breast skin, e.g. redness or dimpling
 - Persistent pain, especially if in one breast



**"YOUR BODY IS A DIVINE GIFT. IT IS BOTH YOUR PROPERTY AND YOUR RESPONSIBILITY. PROTECT IT, TREAT IT WELL."
-ANTHEA PAUL, AUTHOR, "GIRLOSOPHY"**

Breast Self-Exam

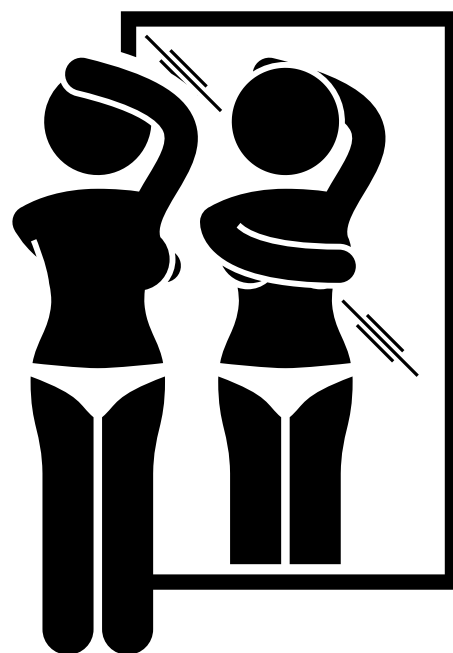
A breast self-exam is easy to do and should be a once-a-month habit for all players. Follow these 2 easy steps:

Look::

- Stand in front of the mirror with your arms behind your head and observe the look of your breasts.
- Then, look for the same signs with your hands on your hips.
- Be very familiar with your breast appearance (shape, size, and skin appearance of each breast and nipple) so you can detect changes early. Asymmetry, dimples, or inverted nipples may be normal for you.

Feel:

- You can do this standing up or lying down. The method is the same for each:
 - Place your left hand behind your head and examine your left breast with your right hand.
 - Feel all the breast tissue from your collarbones to below your bra line and into your armpits.
 - Use the flat pads of the middle three fingers to feel; use a firm, even touch.
 - Work systematically from the outside of the breast into the nipple.
 - Check the nipple for discharge.
 - Repeat for the other side.
 - In the shower: Soap and water make the breast easier to examine.
 - Lying down may be more comfortable for some women.



Best Breast Support

Breasts are made of hormone-sensitive mammary glands, fatty tissue, and connective tissue. They have no truly supportive ligaments or muscles. Breasts will move and “bounce” when you exercise. Uncontrolled breast movement may cause pain, especially in larger breasted athletes, in the breast or upper back, neck, and shoulders, and over time, may exacerbate breast sag or increase stretch marks.

A well-fitting sports bra is a must for all women athletes, regardless of the shape or size of the breasts. To find the right sports bra for you, consider these factors when you make your selection:

- Proper fit is essential for support and comfort. Have your breasts measured and your bra fitted by a bra specialist. (Most major department stores provide this service)
- Support: The bigger your breasts the more support you require. Underwire, individual cup construction, and wide straps are options.
- Straps: Wide straps will more evenly distribute breasts and reduce discomfort and cutting into the skin. The T-back strap design reduces straps slipping off the shoulders.
- Compression: Light elastic tops are not supportive even for small breasts and often result in squashing breast tissue rather than supporting it.
- Moisture control: You sweat when you exercise and to keep you cool and comfortable, choose bras with wicking material to draw sweat away from your skin.
- Friction: Sweat + movement = rubbing. Ensure your bra has proper support and moisture control. Choose outside seams and remove labels to reduce friction.
- Fasteners: Look for a variety of fastener settings to adjust for the best fit, and solid clasps that won't unhook. T-backs or racerbacks won't unhook as you play.
- Appearance: You feel comfortable and confident when your bra fits well. Check that the fabric, even when wet, hides the nipples effectively for your self-assurance.



The Bottom Line: Your Personal Parts

It is important for every woman to practice good genital health. On the outside: The shape and size of each woman's vulva (the area of skin outside the vagina) is unique. Many variations are normal. Become comfortable with the look (you will need a mirror to see) and feel of your genital area. Vulval skin is sensitive but should not be painful.

- Report any unusual pain or lumps to your doctor.
- Shaving or waxing pubic hair is a personal choice and a matter of fashion. If you choose to wax, ensure the salon uses hygienic practices (i.e., using disposable gloves and throwing out used wax).

On the inside: A normal vagina produces a whitish fluid that contains secretions from your cervix, vaginal walls, and glands. The number of discharges changes due to the menstrual cycle, sexual arousal, and some medications. A healthy vagina contains many tiny fungi and bacteria.

- A healthy vagina contains many tiny fungi and bacteria.
- These can get out of balance, causing an infection, which changes the amount, texture, color, or smell of the secretions.
- Seek early help from your doctor if you notice any changes, itchiness, or unpleasant smell.

To keep your vagina and vulva healthy:

- Do not douche or use deodorant/perfume sprays on or in your genitals
- Wear dry cotton underwear that allows airflow
- Wash with warm water and mild soap
- Change your tampon or pad regularly
- If you need antibiotics, talk to your doctor about preventative measures, as they may cause a vaginal infection
- Wear looser trousers/jeans that allow airflow

Pelvic Exam

A Pap smear is a quick, painless test performed by your doctor during a pelvic exam. A sample of cells from the cervix (at the top of the vagina at the neck of the uterus) is removed and sent to a laboratory for examination to detect cancer and pre-cancerous changes in the cervix.

You have an increased risk for cervical cancer if you have a history of sexually transmitted diseases (particularly human papillomavirus, HPV), multiple sex partners, a history of cervical, vaginal or vulvular cancer, or are a smoker.

Your doctor will advise you how often you need a smear test. General guidelines are:

- Pap smears should begin at age 21 and should be every 3 years until age 65.



For more information see the topic "Let's Talk about Sex." Content supplied by Dr. Albert Volk.

The information provided within this "Female Body: An Owner's Manual" topic is for informational purposes only and should not be treated as medical, psychiatric, psychological, health care or health management advice. If you have my health or related questions or concerns, please consult your physician or other qualified health care professional.