



A NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN BREAST CANCER  
SURVIVORSHIP ORGANIZATION

# CHECK YOUR GIRLS

## *Monthly Self Breast Exam*



**LIE DOWN:** Lie down and place your right arm behind your head. The exam is done while lying down, not standing up. This is because when lying down the breast tissue spreads evenly over the chest wall and is as thin as possible, making it easier to feel all the breast tissue.

Use the finger pads of the 3 middle fingers on your left hand to feel for lumps in the right breast. Use overlapping dime-sized circular motions of the finger pads to feel the breast tissue. Repeat the exam on your left breast, using the finger pads of the right hand.



**IN FRONT OF A MIRROR:** While standing in front of a mirror with your hands pressing firmly down on your hips, look at your breasts for any changes of size, shape, contour, dimpling, redness or scaliness of the nipple or breast skin. (The pressing down on the hips position contracts the chest wall muscles and enhances any breast changes.)



**STANDING UP:** Examine each underarm while sitting up or standing and with your arm only slightly raised so you can easily feel in this area. Raising your arm straight up tightens the tissue in this area, making it difficult to examine. Use 3 different levels of pressure to feel all the breast tissue. Light pressure is needed to feel the tissue closest to the skin; medium

pressure to feel a little deeper; and firm pressure to feel the tissue closest to the chest and ribs. It is normal to feel a firm ridge in the lower curve of each breast, but you should tell your doctor if you feel anything else out of the ordinary. If you're not sure how hard to press, talk with your doctor or nurse. Use each pressure level to feel the breast tissue before moving on to the next spot.

Move around the breast in an up and down pattern starting at an imaginary line drawn straight down your side from the underarm and moving across the breast to the middle of the chest bone (sternum or breastbone). Be sure to check the entire breast area going down until you feel only ribs and up to the neck or collar bone (clavicle).

An appointment to discuss your breast cancer treatment options can be an intimidating and overwhelming experience. Anxious feelings about your future combined with your physician's limited time often make you forget important questions that you need to ask.

## CONTACT US: SISTERS NETWORK® INC.

National Headquarters  
9668 Westheimer Road, Suite 200-132  
Houston, TX 77063

866-781-1808

infonet@sistersnetworkinc.org

sistersnetworkinc.org

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