

Breast health awareness: Importance of self examination

Adapted from GBCI-WHO 2023; WHO PEN 2020; NHS Health Scotland and National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.



Breast cancer: Global perspective¹

Breast cancer is the most common cancer globally and the leading cause of cancer death in women; accounting for **~2.3 million cases** and **685,000 deaths** worldwide in 2020



Mortality rates are declining in many HICs **due to increase in awareness, early detection, timely diagnosis, and effective treatment strategies**

Based on current trends, **worldwide incidence is projected to increase to >3 million cases** and **1 million deaths** each year by 2040



Breast cancer can be cured if detected early, and early detection starts with breast health awareness. This is also encouraged to overcome fear, misinformation or stigma associated with cancer

Protection of women from breast cancer safeguards them, and their families and communities



Breast self-examination is regular visual and manual examination of your breasts and armpits, to understand what your breast normally feels like and to detect any changes as early as possible

Signs and symptoms may be due to breast cancer^{1,2}

Redness or warmth of the skin or rash; or enlarged lymph nodes in the armpit's

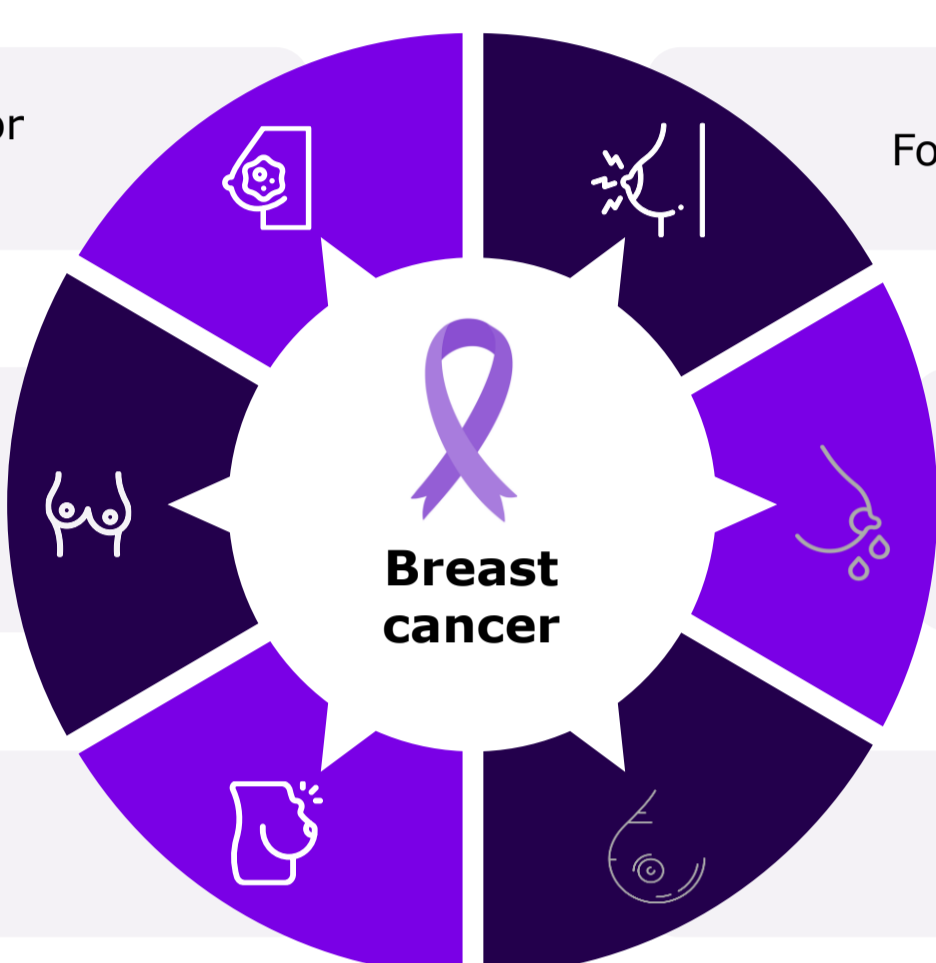
Focal (rather than generalized) breast pain

Painless breast mass or thickening

Nipple discharge (bloody) or retraction; or progressive nipple inversion

Eczematous skin changes or ulceration

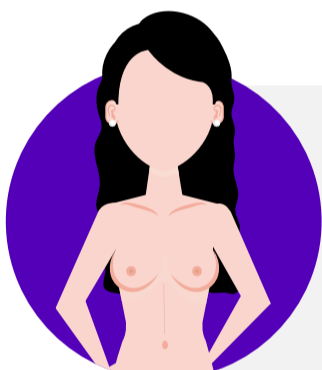
Breast lump or any change in the shape or consistency of the breast



Regular breast self examination^{1,4}

- Breast self examination is aimed to check for early signs of breast disease
- It is performed once every month, and includes self-inspection of the entire breast and armpit on each side to find any lumps, thickenings, or other persistent changes
- Most breast lumps are benign (not cancer), but if you find any abnormality you should always have to see a healthcare professional and undergo necessary test to identify the presence or absence of cancer

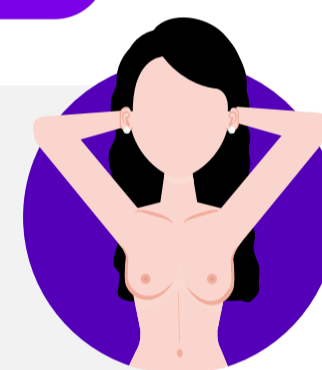
How to examine your breasts^{3,4}



Arms down

In front of the mirror

Inspect the breasts and nipples for changes in the shape, dimpling, swelling, or skin irregularities with arms up/down or resting palms on hip



Arms Up



In the shower*

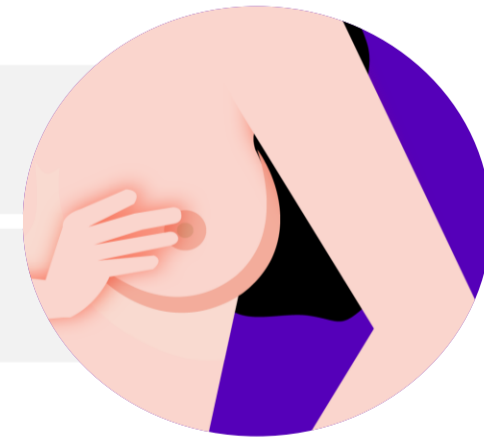
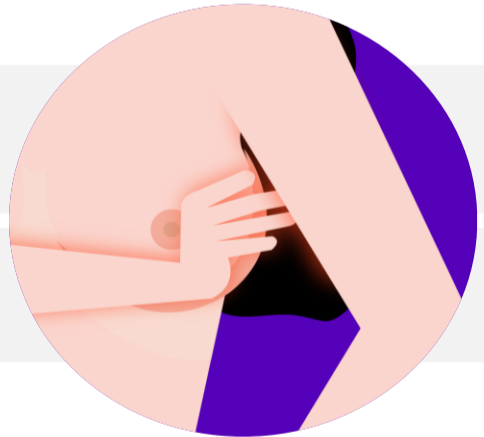
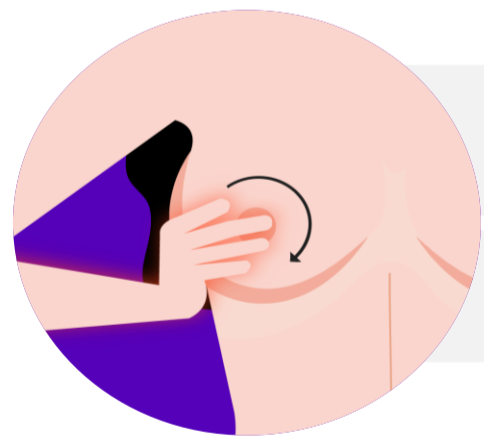
Examine both breasts and armpits with 3 middle fingers, applying light, medium, and firm pressure

While lying down*

Place a pillow under your left shoulder and your left arm behind your head. Use the right-hand fingers to examine the left breast, and finally squeeze the nipple to check for discharge. Swap the pillow and arm positions and examine the right breast with the left hand, in the same way



***Examine by moving your fingers in a small circular motion, making sure you examine the whole breast, including behind the nipple. Then, examine under the arm and in the armpit**

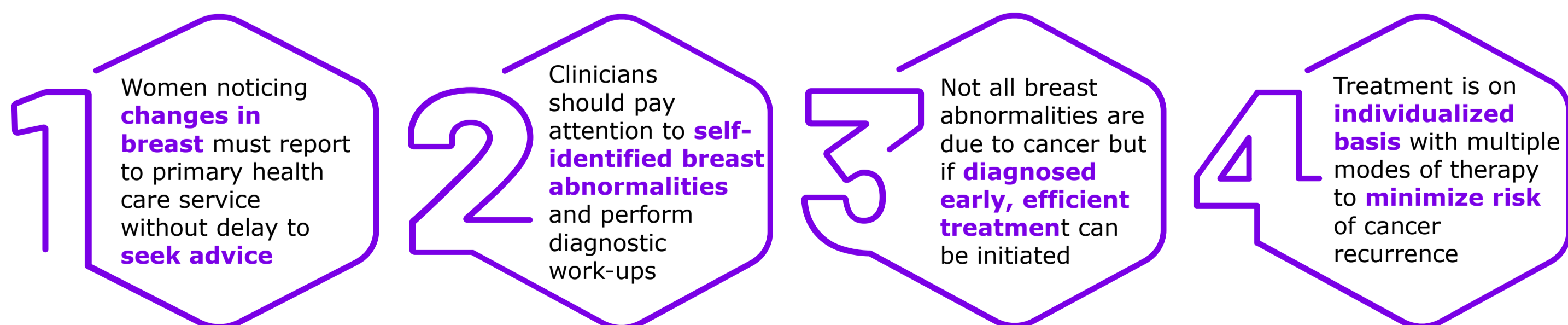


Importance of breast self examination²



- Early identification of breast cancer signs can be done by breast self-examination. Any abnormality should be assessed by a healthcare professional, so that if treatment is required this can be started promptly**
- If you find anything abnormal in your breast or armpit, always ask a healthcare worker to check this. If you are over 30, this should always be at a hospital clinic**
- Globally 90% of all breast cancers are self-detected and not found by mammography**

Seeking medical attention¹



REFERENCES

1) Global Breast Cancer Initiative Implementation Framework: assessing, strengthening and scaling-up of services for the early detection and management of breast cancer. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023; 2) WHO package of essential noncommunicable (PEN) disease interventions for primary health care. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020; 3) NHS Health Scotland is a WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Promotion and Public Health Development https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/03/159-Keep-Yourself-Healthy-A-Guide-To-Examining-Your-Breasts_Easy-Read.pdf; 4) <https://www.nationalbreastcancer.org/breast-self-exam>.

ABBREVIATIONS

HICs, high income countries; GBCI, Global Breast Cancer Initiative; NHS, National Health Service; PEN, package of essential noncommunicable; WHO, World Health Organisation.