

Women's Cancer Information Project

Coordinated by the European Institute of Women's Health

Cancer can occur anywhere in the breast area.

It is usually noticed by any one of the following changes:

- A breast lump – most lumps are harmless. Any new lumps or old ones that change or increase in size should be checked by your doctor. They are usually painless, firm to hard, with irregular borders.
- Lump or mass in the armpit.
- A discharge from the nipple area – any bleeding or weeping.
- Hardening of the skin in the nipple area.
- Changes in the areola (the dark area around the nipple) – puckering or swelling.
- Puckering of the skin in the breast area – a lemon peel effect that may appear similar to cellulite. It may appear as enlarged pores, which may indicate that a tumour is present.
- Inversion of the nipple – turning inward, or at an unusual angle.
- Swelling of the upper arm or armpit just above the breast.
- Dimples.
- Breast discomfort on one side only.
- Breast pain.
- Weight loss.
- Bone pain.
- Breast enlargement on one side only.
- Change in sensation of the nipple, such as itching.

Regular checking will help you notice changes quickly!

You should check your breasts once a month.

This is best done during the week following your period. After the menopause, or if you are pregnant or nursing, examine your breasts on a date you will remember each month, for example the first of each month. If you miss this date, check your breasts as soon as you remember!
