

10 Incredible Facts About Breasts (Bonus: How to Administer a Breast Exam)



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So we're straying a little bit from our usual topics involving workplace safety because October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. For those of you never touched by the dark, rampant reign of cancer of any kind, you're lucky. When it comes to breast cancer, it is the second leading cause of cancer death among women. [3] Additionally, 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States in her lifetime, which means over 246,660 women in the United States will be diagnosed and more than 40,000 will die. [3] On average, every 2 minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer, and 1 woman will die of it every 13 minutes. [3] Men are not immune to breast cancer, either as an estimated 2,600 men will be diagnosed and approximately 440 will die each year. [3] To those battling, have battled, or have a loved one battling breast cancer, we commend your strength and your bravery.



Photo Credit: Georgiy Shipin/ 123RF

Breasts are one of the embodiments of femininity, as their first and foremost natural function is to nurse life and nourishment into the frail bodies of infant humans. Imagine how you'd feel if the same part of your body that nursed life in to your children, is also the same body part that is now taking the life from *you*. It's no secret that breasts are over-sexualized by the media, which is a shame because they're so much more than what our society has reduced them to. I've compiled 10 incredible facts about breasts to re-affirm their genuine importance, and to help raise awareness about breast cancer. It's time our appreciation for them stems from something other than the facts they're *boobs*.

1. Women can [reduce their risk of breast cancer](#) by watching their weight, quitting smoking, exercising regularly, limiting alcohol intake, and avoiding or limiting menopausal hormone replacement therapy. [5]
2. There are several medical terms for breast. Mamm-o as in mammography; mast-o as in mastectomy; maz-o as in "amazon, " which means "without a breast," like the Amazon female warriors of Brazil who legendarily cut off their breasts for improved ability to shoot their bows. [5]
3. Men have nipples and breasts because all fetuses' are female at first. That's right! Every fetus starts as female, and it isn't until six weeks that testosterone starts to take hold. But even before that six-week mark,

- nipples and breasts are already part of the body. [2]
4. There are eight different types of nipples. Including but not limited to flat, normal, puffy and inverted. [2]
 5. A 2013 study found that men who like bigger breasts tend to be less financially secure. Laterally, men who preferred smaller breasts typically made more money. [2] (Arguably not an important statistic about breasts, but interesting, nonetheless.)
 6. Studies show that breastfeeding can have long-term benefits for moms, including lowering risks of heart disease and cancer. [2]
 7. Children who are breastfed have a lower rate of certain illnesses as they grow up. Babies who are not breastfed have a higher risk of asthma, diabetes, and childhood obesity. [6]
 8. Breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast cancer and ovarian cancer in mom. [6]
 9. Nipples can tell you what's wrong. A little discharge that comes out after you've squeezed your nipple is probably no big deal. "But a white, creamy discharge that's released on its own could be a sign of a non-cancerous growth in the brain," says Dweck. Green or black discharge can tip you off to a benign duct problem. And bloody discharge might mean [breast cancer](#). If you experience the latter, bring it to your doctor's attention. [7]

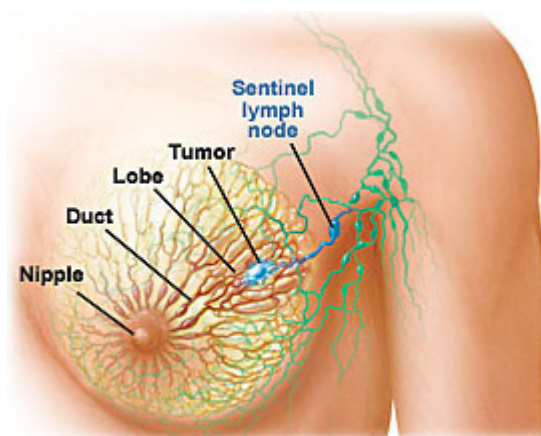


Photo Credit: Celldiagram.net

10. Nipples can span several inches. The size of a woman's nipples and areolas can be as wide as a half-dollar or smaller than a dime, and either way is totally normal, says Alyssa Dweck, M.D., ob-gyn in Westchester, New York and coauthor of *V Is for Vagina*. Gain weight or get pregnant, and they can balloon even bigger, she says. [7]

Now that you know some pretty cool facts about breasts, you'll want to do what you can to make sure the women (or men) in your life keep breast cancer at bay, right? Awesome, because for some bonus material I'm going to tell you how to administer a breast exam. Anyone can perform a breast exam either on someone else (with their permission...) or on yourself. With most cancer, the earlier it is spotted, the earlier treatment can begin, and the higher the rate of survival. Adult women of all ages are encouraged to perform breast self-exams at least once a month, Johns Hopkins Medical center states. [4]

Here's how to perform a breast exam on **yourself** to spot early signs of breast cancer according to BreastCancer.org [4]:

Step 1: Begin by looking at your breasts in the mirror with your shoulders straight and your arms on your hips.

Here's what you should look for:

- Breasts that are their usual size, shape, and color
- Breasts that are evenly shaped without visible distortion or swelling

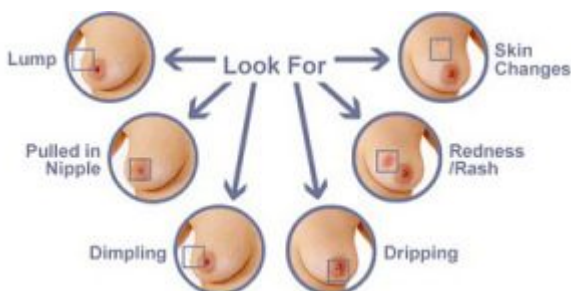


Photo Credit: jeffreysterlingmd.com

If you see any of the following changes, bring them to your doctor's attention:

- Dimpling, puckering, or bulging of the skin
- A nipple that has changed position or an inverted nipple (pushed inward instead of sticking out)
- Redness, soreness, rash, or swelling

Step 2: Now, raise your arms and look for the same changes.

Step 3: While you're at the mirror, look for any signs of fluid coming out of one or both nipples (this could be a watery, milky, or yellow fluid or blood).

Step 4: Next, feel your breasts while lying down, using your right hand to feel your left breast and then your left hand to feel your right breast. Use a firm, smooth touch with the first few finger pads of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together. Use a circular motion, about the size of a quarter.

Cover the entire breast from top to bottom, side to side – from your collarbone to the top of your abdomen, and from your armpit to your cleavage.

Follow a pattern to be sure that you cover the whole breast. You can begin at the nipple, moving in larger and larger circles until you reach the outer edge of the breast. You can also move your fingers up and down vertically, in rows, as if you were mowing a lawn. This up-and-down approach seems to work best for most women. Be sure to feel all the tissue from the front to the back of your breasts: for the skin and tissue just beneath, use light pressure; use medium pressure for tissue in the middle of your breasts; use firm pressure for the deep tissue in the back. When you've reached the deep tissue, you should be able to feel down to your ribcage.

Step 5: Finally, feel your breasts while you are standing or sitting. Many women find that the easiest way to feel their breasts is when their skin is wet and slippery, so they like to do this step in the shower. Cover your entire breast, using the same hand movements described in step 4.



Photo Credit: Cathy Yeulet/ 123RF

Here's how to perform a breast exam on **someone else** to spot early signs of breast cancer:

This is actually a video series by health specialist Carolyn Waygood where she teaches how to give a partner self breast exam which you can watch by clicking [here](#) [1].

Bottom line: Whether you're a man or woman, be proactive about preventing breast cancer for yourself and your partner. Humans have this innate attitude that "it won't happen to me" but it can, and it can happen at any moment. No one is exempt from being dealt one of life's most unfortunate blows, it's best to be prepared should you or a loved one receive a bad card.

References:

[1] ExpertVillage. "How to Do a Partner Self Breast Exam." *Medical Diagnosis Procedures RSS*. Wonderhowto.com, 2011. Web. 04 Oct. 2016.

[2] La Rosa, Erin. "16 Boob Facts That Will Blow You Away." *BuzzFeed*. BuzzFeed, Inc., 10 Sept. 2014. Web. 04 Oct. 2016.

[3] Nbcf. "Breast Cancer Facts : The National Breast Cancer Foundation." *Www.nationalbreastcancer.org*. National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc., n.d. Web. 04 Oct. 2016.

[4] "The Five Steps of a Breast Self-Exam | Breastcancer.org." *Breastcancer.org*. Breastcancer.org, 18 Feb. 2016. Web. 04 Oct. 2016.

[5] Thompson, Elizabeth C., M.D. "31 Important Facts About Breasts." *Womens Wellness*. Everyday Health, 03 Oct. 2014. Web. 04 Oct. 2016.

[6] WomensHealth.gov. "Incredible Facts about Babies, Breast Milk, and Breastfeeding." *Office on Women's Health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 21 Dec. 2012. Web. 04 Oct. 2016.

[7] WomensHealthMag. "11 Nipple Facts You Need in Your Life." *Women's Health*. Rodale, Inc., 27 Oct. 2015. Web. 04 Oct. 2016.