BREAST HEALTH:
WHAT IS NORMAL?
BREAST HEALTH

Breast health is an important part of overall health and well-being. To keep your breasts as healthy as possible:

1. Be breast aware
2. Be informed
3. Make healthy choices

1 Be Breast Aware

It is important to know how your breast tissue normally looks and feels so you can notice changes. Both men and women have breast tissue. Breast tissue covers your chest from the underarms to the breast bone and from the collarbone down to under the breast. Breast tissue can feel lumpy because it is made up of different tissues including:

- fat.
- glandular.
- fibrous connective.
Breast Lumps

Lumps are often part of normal breast tissue.

Your breasts go through many changes over your lifetime. Factors that can change the lumpiness or the way your breasts feel include:

- age.
- changes in hormone levels (e.g. menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause, hormone therapy).
- weight changes.
Common causes of lumpy breasts include:

- a **cyst** which:
  - is a pocket of fluid.
  - often causes tenderness and discomfort.
  - is more common for women age 30-50 just before menstruation.

- a **fibroadenoma** which can occur at any age:
  - is a solid lump of normal breast tissue.
  - can be tender just before menstruation.

- **fibrocystic** breasts which occur at any age may:
  - increase the fibrous connective tissue of the breast.
  - widen the milk ducts.
  - form cysts.
  - cause discomfort or pain.
Breast Pain

Breast pain is common and can happen at any time. It is not common for breast pain to be caused by cancer. Sometimes what feels like breast pain is actually pain from the ribs, cartilage or muscles behind the breast. Wearing a bra that fits well and provides support may help with breast pain.

See your healthcare provider if you have breast pain that:

• worsens.
• does not go away.
• affects sleep or activities.

Nipple Discharge

A small amount of fluid may come out of your breast nipple when squeezed. The fluid may be green, yellow, brown, or grey. This is normal, particularly before menopause. Do not squeeze breast nipples because it may cause more fluid to come out.

See your healthcare provider if you have fluid from your nipple(s) that:

• is new.
• happens without squeezing the nipple.
• is only from one nipple.
• is bloody.
Breast Infection

A breast infection is an infection in the tissues of the breast. A breast infection can affect any woman, but is more common in women who are breastfeeding. It is caused by germs that enter through a break or crack in the skin, often around the nipple. An infected breast usually appears red and swollen and feels warm and tender. Only part of the breast may be red and sore.

Know Your Breasts

See your healthcare provider if you notice any of the changes listed below.

- Puckering of the skin
- A change in the nipple
- New or bloody discharge
2 Be Informed

The cause of breast cancer is not known.
While we do not know the cause of breast cancer, there are many things that can increase your risk of developing breast cancer. Some risk factors:

• we can change, like food or exercise choices.
• we cannot change, like age or family history.

The two most common breast cancer risk factors are:

• being female.
• getting older.

Talk to your healthcare provider about your risk of breast cancer and how you can reduce your risk.
Breast density is **not** related to how your breasts look or feel.

Breast density is a term used to describe how breast tissue looks on a mammogram (breast x-ray). A radiologist is a specially trained doctor who looks at medical test images to diagnose and treat disease. A radiologist can tell if you have dense breasts by looking at your mammogram.

When a person has more glandular and fibrous connective tissue than fatty tissue, their breast tissue may be called dense.
Breast density can:

1. Increase your risk of developing breast cancer.
2. Make it harder to see cancer on a mammogram.

Most cancers are found on a mammogram. Some cancers are not seen on a mammogram. This is more common if the breasts are extremely dense.

At this time, mammography is the best way to screen for breast cancer. Current research does not tell us if women with dense breasts should go for more tests after a mammogram or how often they should be screened. A radiologist may recommend more tests if they think it is best for you.

If you have dense breasts and are concerned about your risk of developing breast cancer you should discuss your personal risk factors with your healthcare provider.

Hormone use has potential benefits and risks

There is a lot of research on hormone use, such as birth control and hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and their effect on breast cancer risk. If you are considering using hormones, it is important to talk to your healthcare provider about the potential benefits and potential risks.
3 Make Healthy Choices

Make healthy choices to help reduce your risk of breast cancer.

Be active
Every 10 minutes of activity you do counts! Being physically active helps you keep a healthy weight and lowers your risk of breast cancer.

Keep your weight as healthy as you can
The more weight gained as an adult and after menopause, the higher the risk of breast cancer later in life.

Limit alcohol use
If you choose to drink alcohol, limit the amount to one drink a day. Drinking alcohol increases your risk of breast cancer.

Eat well
Eat a variety of foods, include whole grains, lots of fruits and vegetables, legumes (dried peas, beans and lentils), and healthy fat. Eat less red and processed meats, sugar and sweetened beverages, and sodium.

Be smoke-free
Using tobacco increases your risk of getting breast cancer. This risk is higher, the younger you start smoking.
• Know what looks and feels normal for your breasts.
• The risk of breast cancer is low.

40–49
• Know what looks and feels normal for your breasts.
• For most women, screening mammography is **not** recommended.

50–74
• Know what looks and feels normal for your breasts.
• Over half of women diagnosed with breast cancer are over age 50.
• Most women age 50–74 should have a screening mammogram every 2 years. Trans men and women may need regular mammograms.
• Call 1-855-95-CHECK to book a screening mammogram at BreastCheck, CancerCare Manitoba.

75+
• Know what looks and feels normal for your breasts.
• Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you should continue screening mammography.

SEE YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF YOU NOTICE CHANGES
• Breast health is an important part of your health no matter your age or gender.

• Know what looks and feels normal for your breasts. See your healthcare provider if you notice any changes.

• Talk to your healthcare provider about your personal risk for breast cancer and ways to reduce your risk.

• If you are age 50-74 call BreastCheck CancerCare Manitoba at 1-855-95-CHECK to make a breast cancer screening mammogram appointment.

• Visit our websites to learn more about breast health.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
(INTERPRETER SERVICES AVAILABLE)

CancerCare Manitoba
BreastCheck
cancercare.mb.ca/screening
Toll free: 1-855-95-CHECK (24325)

Breast & Gyne Cancer Centre of Hope
cancercare.mb.ca/hope
P: 204-787-2970
Toll free: 1-866-561-1026

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Breast Health Centre
wrha.mb.ca/bhc
P: 204-235-3906
Toll free: 1-888-501-5219

Veuillez nous contacter pour obtenir ces renseignements en français.