

WHY YOU MUST EXAMINE YOUR BREASTS

Breast cancer is the UK's most common cancer, but only 35% of us check our breasts...*



We asked Dr Pixie McKenna from TV's *Embarrassing Bodies* to explain how to check your breasts carefully and to answer all your questions...

How do I examine myself properly?

Pixie says: Stand topless in front of a mirror and check the position of your breasts – look for swelling or drooping. Then, in the bath or shower, hold one hand above your head and using the pads of your three middle fingers, press firmly on your skin from the top of your armpit, to under your breast, moving in a spiral motion around the nipple (always use the pads of your fingers, as the tips are too sensitive and the palm of your hand isn't sensitive enough). Pay special attention round your armpit and underneath the nipple. Repeat with the opposite arm and breast. It should take five minutes in total.

What am I looking for?

P: A lump that feels like a rock or a pebble stuck under the breast. This might cause the outside of the breast to look dimpled, like orange peel. Also look for changes in your nipples, such as rashes, discharge or any inversion of the nipples.

What should I do if I find a lump?

P: Go to your GP for an examination asap. Other conditions, like cysts, can have similar symptoms to breast cancer, but *never* assume anything. It's normal to be nervous, but describe your concerns to your GP, including any changes in your menstrual cycle and whether there is a history of cancer in your family – this could make you more at risk. If your GP suspects your lump or symptoms could be cancerous, you'll get an appointment

Get in the habit of checking your breasts every day

What happens when I see a specialist?

P: The specialist will take a full medical history and ask about risk factors – such as family history of cancer, if you're on the Pill and if you've breastfed. Then they'll give you an examination with their hands.

What happens if they're worried?

P: Mammograms aren't very effective on young women, so you'll probably have an ultrasound. The specialists will also take a sample of breast tissue and analyse it to see if surgery is needed. You may then need radiotherapy or chemotherapy, and possibly a mastectomy.

How often should I check my breasts?

P: Get in the habit of checking every day so you notice any changes and know what is normal for you. You'll also notice how they change through the month. It's important to become breast aware as soon as possible.

Why is being breast aware important?

P: If you know the changes you need to be looking for you'll get to the doctor quicker if you do notice something unusual. You're more likely to survive breast cancer if you catch it early – your survival chances are lower if you find it later.

FURTHER EXAMINATION: THE BREASTLIGHT

As well as looking and feeling for changes in your breasts, you can use a new tool, the Breastlight, £77.50. It shines a light through breast tissue, showing up blood vessels and dark lines. By standing

in a darkened room, pressing the Breastlight against your skin and moving it around, you'll spot any changes inside your breast. Any dark spots or shadowy areas should be checked out by

your GP. Call the Breastlight helpline on 0845 251 4448 or go to www.breastlight.com for info. If you're worried you might be affected by cancer go to www.breastcancercare.org.uk.

