



Lifestyle and dietary habits can play a part in reducing the risk of cancer.

- Find sporting activities which you enjoy and ideally do them for 30 - 40 minutes, 3 times per week.
- Only take hormone products after careful consideration and discussion with your doctor.
- Aim for a diet rich in fruit and vegetables, and containing only a small proportion of meat.
- Drink alcohol in moderation and only occasionally - for women the critical limit is 0.33 litres of beer or 0.15 litres of wine per day.
- A healthy diet and regular activity can help to maintain a healthy body weight.

The risk of developing breast cancer cannot be completely eliminated by these measures. It can be reduced, but: enjoyment and quality of life should never be forgotten!

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Dr. Susan Love, the US breast cancer specialist:

"Breast self-examination involves a targeted search for something specific. But in my opinion, it is about getting acquainted with one's own body and breasts, rather than thinking about anything ominous. I would suggest that women should examine their breasts at different times, so that they get to know how they change through the cycle. 80 percent of tumours which are not detected on mammography, have been discovered accidentally by women or their partners - while showering, applying creams or when making love. That is exactly the reason why it is important to sense one's own body, to know it and not constantly look for cancer."

Source: Nationales Netzwerk Frauen und Gesundheit (Hrsg.): Brustkrebs Früherkennung, 1. aktualisierte Auflage, Hannover 2009, S. 16

[National Network for Women and Health (Publisher) Early Recognition of Breast Cancer, 1st updated edition, Hanover 2009, p. 16]

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BREAST SELF- EXAMINATION

Sensible or not?

A useful decision-making guide

Breast self-examination

Breast self-examination, or more precisely *systematic breast self-examination* – is the guidance which suggests regular palpation of the breasts, which women should carry out once a month according to a predefined palpation routine.

For years this examination has been publicly promoted and advertised by health insurance organisations and other institutions. A great deal of money has been spent ensuring women understand *systematic* breast self-examination. To this end, doctor-led courses in palpation, with silicone models, are offered and free information material such as shower cards and DVDs with educational films are distributed.

The desired goal is to detect breast cancer earlier, by means of monthly *systematic* self-examination of the breasts, in order that the cancer can be better treated.

In order to assess the benefits of *systematic* breast self-examination, the following questions need to be answered:

1. Does this *systematic* process help women to recognise breast cancer earlier?
2. Does regular examination by palpation prolong survival after a diagnosis of breast cancer?
3. Could there be negative consequences of breast self-examination?

Evaluation of long-term studies on *systematic* examination by palpation that were conducted in different countries gave the following results:

1. To date there is no clear indication that *systematic* examination contributes to the early detection of breast cancer.
2. Equally, prolonged survival after a diagnosis of breast cancer has not been substantiated.
3. The disadvantage is that by *systematically* and regularly examining their breasts, women often find structures in their breasts which unsettle them and make them worry that they might have cancer.

As a result of this doctor's appointments are increased and almost twice as many biopsy procedures take place, usually without the suspicion of cancer being confirmed.

Conclusion: The efficacy of *systematic* self-examination alone is not confirmed and the probability of a procedure is greater.

In addition, the time between finding a lump and the definitive clarification is often experienced as very stressful, even when the suspicion is not confirmed.

Every woman should decide for herself whether she wishes to carry out the *systematic* examination.

The important thing is that she has been informed of the risks and benefits.

What is the alternative for women?

It is about developing a sensitive and relaxed feeling for one's own body, in order to recognise changes.

It makes sense to be familiar with one's own breasts - how they look and how they feel.

If unusual changes are noticed - for example when showering or applying creams, a doctor should be consulted. Skin changes, retraction of the skin, areas of redness, changes in the nipples, discharge and palpable lumps with or without pain, should all be noted.

"We recommend that women observe and are sensitive to their breasts - and indeed the whole body - without rigid rules and guidelines."

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