

Baylor Clinic Healthletter



Focus On Breast Imaging

October 2007

By Emily Sedgwick, MD, Director of Breast Imaging, Lester and Sue Smith Breast Center at Baylor College of Medicine

“Oh, no! I found a lump in my breast! What do I do now?”

Congratulations! You have already taken the first step towards better health – a breast self-exam.

Step 1: Monthly self-exam

By performing this simple monthly exam, you can determine if there are any changes in your breasts. It is best to examine your breasts at the same time each month because your breast tissue can change over the course of your menstrual cycle.

Step 2: Contact your doctor

If you have identified a new lump, the next step is to contact your doctor immediately. (This goes for men, too. While breast cancer occurs primarily in women, men can also develop the disease.)

Although most breast lumps are benign (not cancer), your doctor may want you to come in for an appointment right away. In some cases, your doctor may ask you to wait for a short period of time to check if there is any change in the lump after you have your next period.

Step 3: Schedule an appointment

Your doctor may order a mammogram (breast X-ray) and ultrasound (sound wave picture) of your breast for diagnosis. Once the order has been placed by your physician, you can choose to have your test(s) performed through the Lester and Sue Smith Breast Center at Baylor College of Medicine.

Step 4: Preparing for your appointment

If at all possible, bring your prior mammograms with you to your appointment – you may be able to avoid a biopsy. Prior mammograms are very important for accurate interpretation of your current mammogram, as they can help show subtle changes over time thereby providing the earliest indication of breast cancer or disease.

On the day of your mammogram, do not wear any deodorant, antiperspirant or baby powder. These products may cause a problem with the mammogram. We also suggest you wear a two-piece outfit. You will be asked to remove your shirt and bra. You will be given a robe to wear while having your mammogram.

Step 5: At the appointment

Plan to spend about an hour in breast imaging to allow for appropriate testing to be completed based on your particular problem. The radiologist (a doctor trained to interpret mammograms and perform breast biopsies) will review your mammogram and ultrasound. He or she will discuss the results with you.

Many women with a lump have a normal mammogram and ultrasound. Most cancers are seen on mammograms and ultrasound, but a small number of cancers are only detected by how they feel. The

likelihood that your lump is cancer is low if you have a normal mammogram and ultrasound, but your doctor should continue to monitor you closely.

Step 6: A biopsy, if needed

If the radiologist recommends a biopsy of a suspicious area seen on the mammogram, at the Baylor Breast Center you will likely be able to have your biopsy that same day. We know that waiting for a biopsy is very difficult for the patient – our goal is to minimize that wait.

Because we try to do biopsies as soon as possible, it would require you to stay in the department for another 90 minutes. During that time a staff member will take your health history and a representative from Financial Services will verify your insurance coverage. Once the paperwork is in order, the biopsy will be performed, using the technique that is appropriate for your situation.

Step 7: The results

The biopsy samples will be sent to the pathology department so they can be analyzed. You should have the biopsy results approximately 2 business days following your biopsy. Typically you will hear the results from your doctor, but the radiologist may also call you with the results.

Remember: most breast lumps are not cancer. Even if your lump is breast cancer, treatment can be very successful, especially if it is found early.

You don't have a breast lump?

Whether you find a lump or not during your monthly self-exams, it is critical that you have an annual screening mammogram. Breast cancer survival depends in large part on how early the disease is detected and treated, making mammograms a woman's best defense against breast cancer today.

The American Cancer Society recommends yearly mammograms once a woman turns 40. Ask your doctor for an order, then call the Lester and Sue Smith Breast Center at Baylor College of Medicine, located in Baylor Clinic, to schedule an appointment.

Emily Sedgwick, MD, is assistant professor of Radiology at Baylor College of Medicine and director of breast imaging at the Smith Breast Center. Dr. Sedgwick focuses on the continual advancement of the breast imaging program, as well as research studies that include working with oncologists to determine the appropriate use of breast MRI.

The Lester and Sue Smith Breast Center at Baylor College of Medicine brings together a multidisciplinary team of breast care specialists in one location, integrated with an internationally recognized research program, all collaborating to provide life-saving patient care today and a cure for tomorrow. A major component of the Dan L. Duncan Cancer Center, an NCI-designated cancer center, the Smith Breast Center is recognized as one of the top breast centers in the world.

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www.baylorclinic.com (select Breast Center) or www.breastcenter.tmc.edu