



# In Focus Breast Cancer

This insidious disease has struck too many, and now too close to home. Ann Schmidt, wife of managing partner Ted Schmidt, was diagnosed with breast cancer in February. She underwent a mastectomy, has already completed chemotherapy and radiation treatment, and will continue with hormone therapy which, according to her doctors, should keep her cancer free. It has been a long and difficult road to recovery but with the proper care and treatment, Ann has beaten the cancer. Ann's physical and emotional strength, courage, and perseverance helped her win the fight against one of the most dangerous cancers for American women. Her fight is an inspiration yet a warning to us all.

Approximately 211,300 American women are diagnosed annually with breast cancer. Thanks to increasing early detection and technological advancements in care and treatment, more and more women are joining the ranks of breast cancer survivors. Breast self-examinations (BSEs) are one of the key factors in early detection.

Protect your family and loved ones – be an active participant in your health and learn to recognize the signs of breast cancer. Contrary to the popular misconception, not having breast cancer in your family history does not mean you are risk free. All women, starting in their teens, should know how to properly perform a BSE. Studies show that regular BSEs combined with an annual exam by a doctor, improves the chance of early detection which is vital to treatment and recovery.

The American Cancer Society recommends that women have a mammogram performed every one to two years beginning at the age of 40, sometimes before, and once a year from age 50 on. The American Cancer Society also recommends that women perform a BSE every month, approximately one week following menstruation. The following are the recommended five steps to a BSE.

**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.

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:** Raise your arms and look for the same changes.

**STEP 3:** While you're at the mirror, gently squeeze each nipple between your finger and thumb and check for nipple discharge (this could be a 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 fingers of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together.

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. Be sure to feel all the breast tissue: just beneath your skin with a soft touch and down deeper with a firmer touch. Begin examining each area with a very soft touch, and then increase pressure so that you can feel the deeper tissue, 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.



Always talk to your doctor about your specific situation. BSEs are only one detection tool but an important tool. If done correctly and regularly, BSEs will save lives. Visit [www.komen.org/bse](http://www.komen.org/bse) for more information on proper BSE technique.