

Women 10 times more likely to do breast self-exams correctly with intervention

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A brief intervention program - consisting of one counseling session and two follow-up phone calls - boosted by tenfold the number of women correctly performing breast self-exams. These are the findings of a Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research study in the *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

Funded by the National Cancer Institute, this study is one of the first to show intervention programs can be effective in increasing breast self-exams. Most previous studies have failed to show an increase in the number of women conducting BSEs correctly.

This intervention program is a model that can be used to encourage patients' participation in their own [health care](#), and can be modified to educate patients about other self-screening techniques for cancers such as melanoma and testicular cancer, say the researchers.

"Many women avoid breast self-exams because they are worried about doing them correctly; however, our study showed that with a relatively simple intervention, women can learn the proper technique, and once they feel confident they will continue to do their exams." said Nangel Lindberg, Ph.D., lead author and investigator at the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research in Portland, Ore. "This is an excellent opportunity for women to participate in their own health care. Self-exams allow women to become familiar with their breasts, so they can report any changes to their health care provider. "

[Breast cancer](#) is the most common form of cancer in women. Every year, more than 1 million cases are diagnosed around the world, including more than 200,000 in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that nearly 40,000 American women will die this year from breast cancer.

This Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research study, conducted from 1998 through 2001, involved more than 600 women, aged 40 to 70, who had a negative mammogram screening within the last two months. The women were randomized to a group that received dietary counseling with no mention of BSE, or the study group that received a 30 to 45-minute counseling session in which they watched an educational video, practiced BSE on a silicone model, and discussed possible barriers to doing self-exams. At one and two months after the session, the women also received follow-up phone calls. Before the intervention about six percent of women in both groups were performing adequate self exams - defined as lasting at least five minutes, occurring every month, and fulfilling specific criteria taught during the counseling sessions. One year after the program, 59 percent of women in the intervention group were performing adequate self-exams, compared to only 12 percent of women who received dietary counseling.

Early detection is an important factor in the success of breast cancer treatment. While some studies have shown that BSE does not reduce the number of deaths from breast cancer, it may help familiarize [women](#) with their normal breast tissue -which aids in identifying new or unusual changes in their breasts. Many experts believe along with regular mammography and clinical breast exams BSE can play an important role in early detection.

Study limitations include the fact that the results are based on self-reported data, and that all the participants in the study had health insurance, so results may not be applicable to populations without health

insurance.

Source: Kaiser Permanente ([news](#) : [web](#))

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