

# Women's Health

Permafold®: What You Need To Know



## Topics

1. Breast Lumps & Cancer
2. Menopause
3. Menstrual Cramps
4. Breast Self-Exam (BSE)
5. Osteoporosis
6. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)
7. Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)
8. Vaginal Yeast Infections
9. Tests & Exams



## 1. Breast Lumps & Cancer

Eighty to 90% of breast lumps are not cancerous.

### Symptoms

- Lumps can be painless or painful; firm, rubbery, or tender to the touch. They can be near the skin surface of the breast and/or deep within the breast.
- A change occurs in the shape or contour of the breast. The skin on a breast thickens, dimples, puckers, or retracts.
- A nipple discharge is nonmilky or bloody. Nipples are inverted, crusty, or drawn into the chest.
- Breast pain or constant tenderness occurs all through the menstrual cycle.

### Prevention/Self-Care

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- Do regular exercise.
- Eat a variety of whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Limit alcohol to 1 drink per day, if any.
- Breast-feed your babies.
- Avoid unnecessary X-rays. Wear a lead apron when you get dental and other X-rays not of the chest.
- Do breast self-exams as advised. (See topic 4.)
- **Call Doctor For:**
  - Any symptom of breast lumps and cancer listed above.
  - Clinical breast exam and mammogram appointments. (See topic 9.)
  - Breast cancer risk assessment and advice on taking prescribed medicine, such as raloxifene, if at a high risk.



## 2. Menopause

Menopause (“the change of life”) is when a woman’s menstrual periods have stopped for 1 whole year. This usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55.

### Symptoms

- Hot flashes (sometimes with heart palpitations) and night sweats.
- Irregular periods before they stop for life.
- Vaginal dryness.
- Bones become more brittle.
- Muscles lose some strength and tone.
- Skin begins to wrinkle.
- Being cranky. Mood swings. Lack of concentration. Memory problems.
- Loss of bladder tone, causing urine to leak with coughs, sneezes, etc.



### Self-Care

#### For Hot Flashes and Night Sweats

- Keep cool. Lower the thermostat. Use air conditioning and/or fans.
- Wear lightweight, cotton clothes. Dress in layers. When you sleep, have changes of nightwear ready. Use a top sheet, not blankets.
- Limit caffeine and alcohol. Avoid rich and/or spicy foods. Don’t eat a lot of food at one time.
- Drink cool water when you feel a hot flash coming on and before and after exercise. Avoid hot drinks.
- Have 1 to 2 servings per day of soy foods (soybeans, soy milk, soy yogurt, tofu, miso, etc.), unless you have a history of breast lumps or cancer.
- Relax, meditate, etc.

#### For Vaginal Dryness and Painful Intercourse

- Don’t use deodorant soaps or scented products in the vaginal area.
- Use a water soluble lubricant (e.g., K-Y Liquid®). Avoid oil or petroleum-based products.
- Use an estrogen cream, tablets, or estrogen ring that can be inserted into the vagina. Your doctor needs to prescribe these.
- Stay sexually active.
- Don’t use antihistamines, unless truly needed.

#### To Deal with Emotional Symptoms

- Do regular exercise.
- Talk to women who have gone through menopause.
- Manage stress. Relax, meditate, etc.
- Eat healthy. Check with your doctor about taking vitamin, mineral, and herbal supplements.



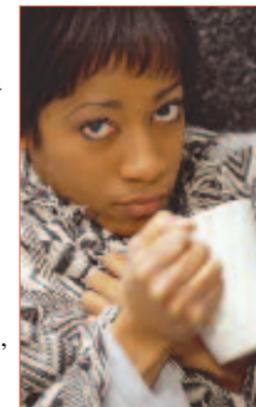
#### Call Doctor For:

- Heavy bleeding with your periods, bleeding often between periods, or passing many blood clots.
- Symptoms that are severe or occur often enough to interfere with your normal activities.
- Menstrual periods that have begun again after stopping for 6 months.
- Advice on: Taking hormone therapy; other medicines, vitamins, minerals, and herbal supplements for menopause symptoms; and medicines to prevent or treat osteoporosis.
- Side effects, if taking medicines for menopause.

## 3. Menstrual Cramps

### Symptoms

Mild to severe pain in the lower abdomen a few days before and after the start of a menstrual period. Backache, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, and/or headaches may occur.



### Prevention/Self-Care

- Take an OTC\* medicine for pain and swelling (i.e., ibuprofen, naproxen, sodium). Acetaminophen can help the pain, too. {*Note:* If under 19 years old, don’t use aspirin, due to its link to Reye’s Syndrome.}
- Hold a heating pad or hot-water bottle on your abdomen or lower back.
- Take a warm bath.
- Gently massage your abdomen.
- Drink warm tea.
- Do mild exercises. Stretch. Do yoga. Walk. Bicycle.
- Limit stress as your period gets closer.
- For birth control, consider using the pill, the patch, or the Progestasert® IUD.

#### Call Doctor For:

- Extreme pain or if you have had pain-free periods for years, but now have severe cramps.
- Menstrual cramps not near your menstrual period.
- Cramps with no menstrual period.
- Menstrual cramps that are not helped with self-care.

\*Over-the-Counter

Hang this card on a doorknob, mirror, or in the shower. (This card is waterproof.)

Knowing how to do a BSE is not enough. Doing it as advised is what matters.

## 4. Breast Self-Exam (BSE)

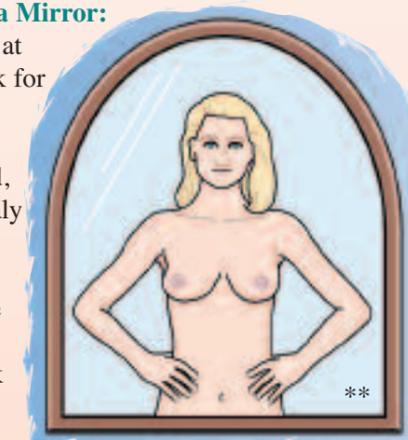
Experts differ on the benefits of doing routine BSEs. Do a BSE once a month or as advised. Do it at the same time each month to learn what is normal for you. If you menstruate, the best time to do a BSE is within 3 days after your period stops. If you have gone through menopause, do a BSE the same day of each month. Pick a day, such as the first day of the month.

Some lumpiness or thickening in the breasts is normal. Your “job” isn’t just to find lumps, but to notice if there are any changes. If you find a change in a breast, a clear or bloody nipple discharge, or a lump, **DON’T PANIC!** Call your doctor or health care provider. Most lumps are not cancer.

### DO a BSE in 3 STEPS

#### 1. In Front of a Mirror:

Hold your arms at your sides. Look for changes in the shape of your breasts; dimpled, puckered, or scaly skin; or nipple changes or discharge. Raise your arms over your head. Look for the same things.



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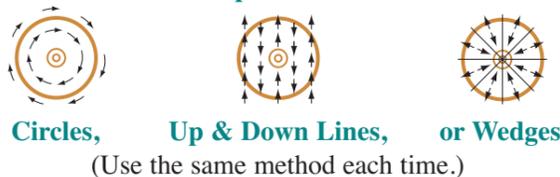


Reviewed and Approved by the Senior Medical Advisory Board

This Permafold® is not meant to take the place of expert medical care or treatment. Follow your doctor’s or health care provider’s advice.

The advice on this card is not meant to take the place of expert medical care.

Do steps 2 and 3 in:



### 2. In the Shower:

Lather your breasts with soap. Raise one arm. Move the pads of your 3 middle fingers, held flat, along the collarbone, over the entire breast (the tissue around the nipple, too), and underarm area. Use your right fingers for your left breast and your left fingers for your right breast. Check for changes, lumps, knots, etc.



### 3. Lying Down:

Place a pillow under your right shoulder and your right hand behind your head. Move the pads of your left hand's 3 middle fingers, held flat,

along the collarbone and over the entire right breast and underarm area. Massage the colored tissue around the nipple. Squeeze the nipple gently. Check for a clear or bloody discharge. Repeat all of these steps for the left breast.



## 5. Osteoporosis

### Symptoms

- Gradual loss of height. Stooped posture or “dowager’s” hump.
- Rounding of the shoulders.
- Back pain.



Often the 1<sup>st</sup> sign is a fracture of the hip, wrist, or spine.

### Prevention/Self-Care

- Take medication to prevent bone loss or treat osteoporosis, as advised by your doctor.
- Follow a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D. Take calcium and vitamin D supplements, as advised by your doctor.
- Do weight-bearing exercises, such as walking, 3 or more times a week. Do the exercises your doctor advises.
- Don’t smoke. If you smoke, quit.
- Limit alcohol intake to 1 drink per day, if any.
- Prevent falls. Use grab bars and safety mats in your tub or shower. Use handrails on stairs. Wear flat, sturdy, nonskid shoes. Use rugs with nonskid backs. Be careful if you have to walk on snow and ice.

### Call Doctor For:

- Constant pain in your back, ribs, spine, or feet.
- A curved back (“dowager’s hump”).
- Advice on medicines to prevent bone loss and to treat osteoporosis.

### Get Medical Care Fast For:

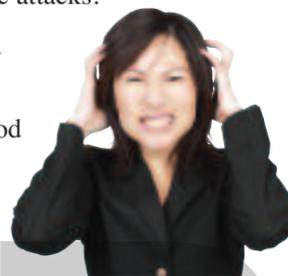
- A bone fracture with severe bleeding or any deformity at the fracture site.
- Cold, blue skin under the fracture and/or numbness below the fracture.

## 6. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

### Symptoms

With PMS, symptoms must occur anytime within 2 weeks before the menstrual period and go away shortly after the period begins. Common ones are:

- Anxiety. Irritability. Panic attacks.
- Bloating in the abdomen. Breast tenderness.
- Depression. Fatigue. Mood swings.
- Feelings of hostility and anger.
- Food cravings (chocolate, sweet, and salty foods).
- Headache.



### Prevention/Self-Care

- Get emotional support.
- Do aerobic exercises. Swim. Walk. Bicycle.
- Eat carbohydrate rich foods (e.g., whole-grain breads and cereals, vegetables, fruits).
- Limit or avoid caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes two weeks before your period is due.
- Limit salt, fat, and sugar.
- Rest. Take naps if you need to.
- Relax. Take a warm bath. Meditate. Do yoga, etc.
- Manage stress.

### Call Doctor For:

- PMS symptoms that make you unable to carry out daily tasks.
- Not feeling better after using Prevention/Self-Care.
- Advice on medicines and supplements for PMS.

## 7. Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

### Symptoms

Blood in the urine. Pain or burning when you pass urine. Pain in the abdomen, back, or sides. Constant urge to urinate. Urinating often. Chills, fever, nausea, and/or vomiting. (You may not have any symptoms.)

### Prevention/Self-Care

- Wipe from front to back after using the toilet.
- Drink at least 8 glasses of liquids a day.
- Empty your bladder as soon as you feel the urge.
- Wear cotton underwear and loose-fitting slacks.
- If you are prone to UTI’s, don’t take bubble baths.
- If you use a diaphragm, remove it within 8 hours after sex. Clean it after each use. Change tampons sooner than 8 hours.
- For symptoms of a UTI:
  - Rest. Drink plenty of liquids. Avoid alcohol, spicy foods, and coffee.
  - Take an over-the-counter medicine for pain (e.g., Uristat®, ibuprofen, etc.)



### Call Doctor For:

- One or more symptoms of a UTI listed above.
- Side effects (e.g., skin rash), after taking medicine your doctor prescribed for a UTI.

### Get Medical Care Now For:

- Fever and shaking chills, mid-back pain, and nausea or vomiting.
- UTI symptoms, if you are pregnant.

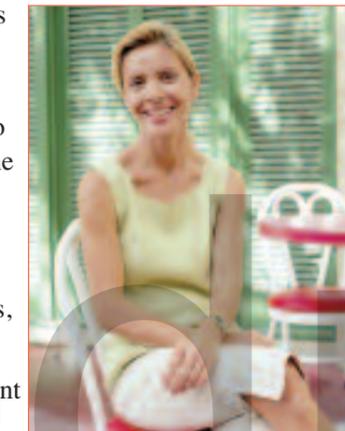
## 8. Vaginal Yeast Infections

### Symptoms

Itching, redness, and pain around the outside genital area. Thick, white discharge from the vagina. Burning and/or pain when you urinate or have sex. {*Note:* This could also be a symptom of a UTI. See topic 7.}

### Prevention/Self-Care

- Keep the vagina as clean and dry as possible.
- Wipe from front to back after using the toilet.
- Wear cotton underwear and loose-fitting slacks, etc.
- Don’t use deodorant soaps, scented tampons, or douches.
- Eat well. Have foods, such as yogurt, with live cultures of “lactobacillus acidophilus.”
- When you have a vaginal yeast infection:
  - Use an OTC\* medication, (e.g., Monistat®).
  - Limit your intake of sugar and foods with sugar.



### Call Doctor For:

- Yeast infection symptoms that get worse with or do not respond to self-care.
- Frequent vaginal yeast infections or ones that come back within 2 months of treatment.
- Medical care if this is your first vaginal yeast infection or if you are not sure you have one.

\*Over-the-Counter

## 9. Tests & Exams\*

Test	Ages 18–40	Ages 40–50	Ages 50+
Dental Checkup	Every 6 to 12 months		
Physical Exam	Every 2 to 4 years (Every 5 years ages 18-29)	Every 1 to 2 years	
Blood Pressure	Each office visit; at least every 2 years		
Vision Exam	Every 2 to 4 years (Every 5 years ages 18-29)	Every 1 to 2 years	
Chlamydia Screening	Discuss with doctor		
Pap Test	At least every 3 years or as advised		
Breast Self-Exam	Discuss with doctor. (See Topic 4.)		
Breast Exam by Doctor or Nurse	Every 3 years	Every year	
Mammogram	Every 1 to 2 years		
Cholesterol Blood Test			Starting at age 45, as advised. Earlier if at increased risk for heart disease, as advised.
Colorectal Cancer Screening			Discuss with doctor
Osteoporosis Screening	Starting at age 65 (60 if at increased risk for fractures) as often as advised		

\* Women should also be screened for alcohol misuse, depression, obesity, and tobacco use. If you are at an increased risk for an illness, tests may need to be done sooner or more often. Extra tests (e.g., screening for diabetes, glaucoma) may be needed. Follow your doctor’s advice for tests and exams.

### For More Information, Contact:

National Women’s Health Information Center  
800.944.9662 • [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)

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