The incidence of female breast cancer continues to increase. To date, breast cancer is one of the most commonly encountered malignancies in women around the world. With 25% prevalence, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in Turkey (Ministry of Health, 2005). In fact, a Turkish study involving 23,384 women with cancer diagnoses from 1994–2004 revealed that 34% had breast cancer (Izmirli, Altin, Dernek, & Unsal, 2007). An estimated 30,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year in Turkey (MEVA, 2008).

Breast cancer is the second leading cause (15%) of cancer deaths in women. Mortality rates are highest for women aged 20–59, followed by women aged 60–79 and those older than 80, respectively (Greenlee, Hill-Harmon, Murray, & Thun, 2001; Imaginis, 2006; Jemal et al., 2008). The incidence of breast cancer is low in younger women; however, when younger women are diagnosed, the cancer tends to progress rapidly (Imaginis; Jemal et al.). When breast cancer is diagnosed relatively early, life expectancy and quality of life increase. Early diagnosis also decreases potential for certain symptoms such as pain, resulting in decreased expenses of treatment. Early diagnosis and treatment are important in decreasing breast cancer mortality (Imaginis; Jemal et al.; Smith, Cokkinides, Eyre, & American Cancer Society, 2003). Diagnosing tumors in the breast at a diameter of less than 2 cm also increases five-year survival up to 90% (American Cancer Society, 2007).

Because complete prevention of breast cancer is not yet possible, early detection and effective therapy are important in attempting to improve diagnosis and prognosis for women with the disease (Budden, 1998). However, in contrast to more economically developed countries, where less than 10% of women present with late-stage cancer, 50% of women in less developed countries, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, present at stage III (Anderson et al., 2003).

Three basic methods are employed in diagnosing breast cancer early, but their relative use is highly debated. The methods are breast self-examination (BSE), clinical breast examination (CBE), and mammography.