

Keeping abreast

Body Language

Shani Raviv

I've never been big on breasts. At first I shunned them. Then I strapped them down in puberty's equivalent of a straightjacket. And as a teenager, I often left them hanging.

Only now as an adult am I paying them the respect they deserve by cupping them in imported cotton from lingerie boutiques with names like French confectionaries.

And only as an adult have I stopped dating guys who tentatively caress like they're discovering the bald spot on their heads or scrunch like they're fingering their balls.

Which is why at the onset of a lumpy boob with persistent tenderness, bordering on an acutely unpleasant physical discomfort, following an unintentional hard tap from my two-year-old niece, I did not hesitate to contact my GP.

Because nobody knows less about our breasts than we do.

But whether we are well endowed, underdeveloped or silicon implanted, a sore, tender breast is not something women can afford to ignore. And we alone need to keep abreast.

So I booked for what too many misinformed women delay until menopause for fear of pain. A fear which has obviously travelled through the grapevine and fermented because a mammogram (mammo) is really nothing more than an X-ray of the breasts and

nothing short of odd.

In a tiny hospital room I am told to don a gown, just for formality I presume, because I slip it off seconds later so that two silver balls like the ones that make up the chain of a bath plug can be taped to each nipple.

This is not medical malpractice by a kinky radiographer, it's so that the nipple can be easily located on the X-ray.

I approach a high-tech machine and twist my body side-ways like learning a Salsa move with some womaniser who doesn't speak English. I slap my right breast onto a cold slab of plastic while the radiographer kneels like she is about to milk a cow and presses down the breast, which is as reluctant as wet prestik.

Then she hides behind the machine and hits the controls.

The breast gets compacted between two plastic slabs and she sounds genuinely remorseful while insisting that she must squash more. I just hang there watching the breast pulp flatten like rolled dough in the hands of an Italian baker.

Then I swap sides and do the dance all over again, this time changing partners, and the whole "ordeal" is over in three and a half minutes. I'm tempted to do it again simply for the absurd feeling, but it's time for her to consult the radiologist.

So I'm left alone with the generic female literature you find in most doctors' rooms — *Your Family and Wedding* — which I find morbidly ironic since on the unwanted discovery of a malignant lump these would undoubtedly be the magazine titles a woman would most likely avoid.

But the laminated page torn out



Mammograms are not as painful as they seem to be. Photograph: AP

of *Cosmopolitan* that says: "The lowdown on lumps" really grabs me by the balls. The pictures of a magnified popcorn kernel, a pink rubber ball, a bowl of oats and a walnut shell each describing a lump, cyst, tumour or sac are engrossing.

Stuck on the wall is a photocopied page explaining the mental and physical preparation necessary before having a mammogram. It says you should open the fridge door and insert your breast and get a strong friend to slam the door shut. I think it's a joke but one never can tell with doctors.

Then it's time for the follow-up ultra-sound with the radiologist who, with a heavy hand, squirts blue gel like the ice whitening toothpaste I

just bought, from a ubiquitous plastic bottle used to store cheap mustard.

"It's looking good," he says before muttering medical jargon.

Later I get to take home a brown envelope containing my X-rays with a note attached that says something like: appearances non-specific but in the inner quadrant at 12/2 o'clock was probably a resolving haematoma.

No wonder he said it was most likely just caused by my niece's innocent tap.

Maybe here's one doctor who understands the significance of reducing women's compulsion to complicate criteria to one small word: clot.