

## BREAST PAIN IS A VERY COMMON ISSUE FOR WOMEN

Almost 70 percent of women experience breast tenderness or aching at some point in their lives. It can be mild or sharp and very uncomfortable. The pain may be constant or it may only occur occasionally.

Breast pain signals a noncancerous (benign) condition and rarely signifies breast cancer. If your mammogram is normal and there are no lumps or bumps, the breast pain is probably benign. Breast pain that does not go away after several months should be evaluated by your physician.

### BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION

*Just as your period ends, or at the same time each month if you do not have periods, check for any changes in the normal look and feel of your breasts. Report any changes to your physician.*

## CHEST WALL PAIN

Pain in the chest wall of musculoskeletal pain can imitate breast pain. Any new physical activity can bring on muscle soreness. This pain is usually worsened when taking a deep breath, raising arms overhead or pressing in on the breastbone. Anti-inflammatory medications (Ibuprofen, Motrin®, Aleve® or Advil®) can be helpful if the pain is severe.

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# UNDERSTANDING BREAST PAIN



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## CAUSES OF BREAST PAIN

The cause of breast pain is difficult to diagnose because there are many possibilities. Almost all breast pain is benign (not caused by cancer). Only 10 percent of breast cancers are painful. The following are common causes of breast pain.

### Cyclic

The most frequent cause of breast pain is cyclic hormonal changes due to the surge of estrogen before the menstrual period. This may include tenderness, shooting pain, aching and increased generalized lumpiness. This may occur about one week prior to your period and usually disappears with the end of the menstrual cycle.

Women may experience cyclic pain in both breasts. Some find one breast is more painful than the other. This pain is most commonly experienced by pre-menopausal women and may worsen before beginning menopause.

Hormone replacement therapy with estrogen may stimulate natural hormonal responses and cause breast pain. High levels of estrogen or low levels of progesterone can cause pain also.

### Non-cyclic

Non-cyclic breast pain is not related to hormonal changes. Pain can be constant or sporadic and is usually in one area of the breast. Notify your physician if you experience sudden pain, pain lasting several weeks, severe pain, pain only affecting one breast or pain with redness and warmth of the breast.

### Caffeine

Although there is no strong research to prove an association between caffeine and breast pain, some women find that reducing or eliminating caffeine reduces it.

### Smoking

Women who smoke tend to experience more breast pain. The nicotine in cigarettes narrows the blood vessels above the waist in women, contributing to breast pain.

### Herbs

Many herbal products may cause breast pain. Herbs are common ingredients in weight loss products. The most common are: ginseng, dong quai, ma huang, guarana, kola nut and soy.

### High-salt or high-fat diet

A high-sodium diet will cause your body to retain more fluid. Only 2,000 to 3,000 milligrams of sodium a day are recommended. Limit your intake:

- Read food labels
- Limit canned foods and processed meats
- Limit caffeinated sodas
- Avoid using the salt shaker
- Drink six to eight glasses of water a day

### Injury

Injury to the breast may cause short-term tenderness and pain. Commonly, women will experience some bruising at the affected areas. As discoloration decreases, the pain usually subsides. Trauma does not increase the risk of breast cancer.

### Bras

Most women do not wear a properly fitted bra and by correcting this you can eliminate breast pain. When your bra loses support, it's time to replace it. All women should be properly measured and fitted. Many local department stores provide fitting services at no cost. Avoid going braless. For some, sleeping in a sports bra may help.

## HELPFUL TIPS IN DETECTING BREAST PAIN

- Keep a calendar of the pain. See if the pain is related to your menstrual cycle.
- Check if your prescription or over-the-counter medications may cause breast pain
- Get fitted for a new bra
- Have your thyroid levels checked as some thyroid conditions cause breast pain
- Stop smoking

## HELP FOR BREAST PAIN

- Ice for 20 minutes, three times a day
- Take a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAIDs), such as Advil®, three times a day for one week
- Wear a sports bra

Some women also have found relief by trying one or a combination of the following:

- Reducing caffeine intake
- Eliminating smoking
- Using warm or cold compresses
- Taking vitamin A, E or B complex or evening primrose oil
- Massaging breasts

Women respond differently to each remedy. Several measures may take up to one month to be effective.