

Breast Pain

A Guide for Women



SCAN HERE

This booklet will be reviewed as new evidence emerges. While every effort has been made to ensure that it is accurate, we do not accept responsibility for errors or omissions.

Breast pain

A guide for women

Overview

Breast pain (mastalgia) is very common. It affects most women at sometime in their life. It can cause worry but breast pain is not usually a symptom of breast cancer.

The level of breast pain is different for each woman. It can range from being a mild discomfort to being severe enough to affect a woman's quality of life.

Are there different types of breast pain?

Yes, there are two main types of breast pain:

1. Cyclical
2. Non-cyclical

1. Cyclical pain

What is cyclical breast pain?


This is the most common type of breast pain. It usually affects both breasts and happens in women between the ages of 20 and 50 years. It generally happens three to seven days before the period (menstruation). In severe cases the pain can last for up to two weeks. It can affect the whole breast or just the outer part of the breast. The pain goes away when the period begins. This pain is due to normal hormonal changes.

What are hormones?

Hormones are chemicals that are released from glands to control metabolism. The main hormones that control the period (menstrual cycle) are oestrogen and progesterone.

What can I do to relieve cyclical breast pain?

- Wear a correctly fitted bra. You should be refitted every time you buy a bra
- Take simple pain relief
- If your pain gets worse while taking the Oral Contraceptive Pill (OCP) or Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) you can talk to your doctor (GP) about taking a different brand
- Eat a well-balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables (try to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day)

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- Take 30 minutes of regular exercise every day
 - Reduce caffeine intake in the days before your period
 - Evening primrose oil may help, and should be taken daily for at least three months. It should not be used if you are pregnant or breast feeding. Ask your GP or pharmacist for advice

2. Non-cyclical pain


What is non-cyclical breast pain?

Non-cyclical pain is not related to the period (menstruation). While the pain can occur both before and after the menopause, it is more common when you are aged over 40 years.

The pain can be in one or both breasts. It can come and go but it is not relieved by your period. It is not related to the Oral Contraceptive Pill (OCP) but some forms of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) may cause discomfort. Non-cyclical breast pain is not usually a symptom of cancer.

What are the common causes of non-cyclical breast pain?

- Drinking a lot of caffeine
- Injury to the breast (this might include scarring from surgery)

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- Poor posture may cause pain in the joints around the chest and in the back
 - The pain may not be in the breast at all. The pain may come from the chest wall, ribs, or muscles that lie behind the breast, for example arthritis
 - Sometimes no cause is found for this type of pain

How can non-cyclical breast pain be managed?

- Evening primrose oil may help but it is less effective than in cyclical breast pain
- If the pain is only in one area of the chest wall an anti-inflammatory cream may give relief
- Take 30 minutes of regular exercise every day
- Reduce caffeine intake
- Keep a healthy weight. Losing extra weight may reduce breast pain by stabilising your hormone levels
- The pain may go away after a few months, however if you have any concerns or worries please see your GP again



When should I see my GP?

You should see your GP if you notice any of the following:

- A breast lump or a lump under the armpit
- Hardness or swelling of the breast
- Nipple discharge, especially if the discharge looks like blood or pus
- Red areas or itching around the nipple that do not heal
- Nipple recently turned in, pulled up or down
- Change in the skin of the breast, such as dimpled or puckered skin, scaly or “orange peel” appearance
- Change in the appearance of the breast, for example in shape or outline
- Lumpiness, especially if this is in one breast
- Infection of the breast (mastitis). If you have recently given birth or are breast feeding and you have a swollen, red, hard and painful breast, you may have mastitis. This can be treated with antibiotics. You should see your GP immediately

Even when breast pain is associated with a breast lump, it is unlikely to be cancer. If you find a breast lump, whether associated with pain or not, you must see your GP.

Breast awareness

What is breast awareness?

Learning how your breasts look and feel at different times helps you to know what is normal for you and to recognise any unusual or irregular changes. Being breast aware is important from your mid-twenties onwards.

Breast Self-Exam

(Courtesy of www.breastcancer.org)



1. Look for changes in the appearance of your breast. Stand and look in the mirror with your shoulders straight and your arms on your hips.



2. Raise your arms and look for changes in appearance. Check nipples for changes or discharge.



3. Feel your breasts. Use your right hand to feel your left breast and then your left hand to feel your right breast. Keep your fingers flat and together. Using a circular motion, cover your entire breast from top to bottom, side to side, from your collarbone to the top of your abdomen, and from your armpit to your cleavage.





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Daily Breast Pain Chart (complete for three months)

Name: _____

Record the amount of breast pain you experience each day by shading in each box as illustrated	 Severe Pain	For example: if you get severe breast pain on the 5th of the month then shade in box under number 5, for PAIN , completely. Please note the day your period starts each month by putting the letter 'P' in the line provided
	 Mild Pain	
	<input type="checkbox"/> No Pain	

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
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