

Breast Pain (Mastalgia)

Breast pain and tenderness are very common in women. Breast pain is most common in young and middle-aged women, but sometimes occurs in older women. There are 3 types of breast pain, with different causes.

Extramammary Breast Pain

Extramammary breast pain is felt in the breast area but comes from somewhere else. This pain may be caused by:

- Pulled muscle
- Skin injury
- Heartburn
- Chest pain

Cyclic Breast Pain

Cyclic (sik-lik) breast pain is related to the menstrual cycle. It can be caused by normal monthly changes in hormones, reproductive hormones, certain hormonal medications, infertility treatments, birth control pills, and hormone replacement therapy. Cyclic pain:

- Is often described as dull, heavy, aching or soreness.
- May make your breasts feel swollen and lumpy.
- Usually affects both breasts.
- Is felt especially in the upper outer part of the breast. The pain can spread out to the armpit and arm.
- Is felt 1 or 2 weeks before your monthly period. The pain then gets better after the start of your period.

Noncyclic Breast Pain

Noncyclic breast pain is common in women 30 to 50 years of age. The pain is not related to the menstrual cycle. It can be caused by breast cysts, mastitis, breast injury, prior breast surgery, and medications. Women with large breasts may also have pain that is related to strain on their ligaments, neck, shoulders, and back. Noncyclic pain:

- Can be constant or may come and go.
- Is often described as sharp, tight, or burning.
- Usually affects only 1 breast, but can affect both.

When to See a Doctor

Breast pain is rarely a symptom of breast cancer. Contact your provider if:

- Your breast pain occurs every day for more than 2 to 3 weeks.
- Your breast pain is getting worse.
- You notice new breast changes, such as:
 - A hardened area or lump in your breast
 - Nipple discharge
 - Changes in the appearance of your breast or nipple
- You have signs of an infection, including:
 - A fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
 - Breast pain with redness or swelling

Self-Care

- Wear a supportive and well-fitting bra, such as a sports bra when the breasts are most sensitive.
- Heat, such as from a heating pad or warm compresses can provide relief.
- For some women a cold compress helps.
- Reduce or eliminate the amount of caffeine in your diet.

- Follow a low-fat diet as part of an overall healthy eating plan.
- Reduce the dose of hormone replacement therapy.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin).
- Try relaxation therapy. You may learn to control the high level of anxiety associated with severe breast pain.
- Keep a journal about breast pain to determine if your pain is cyclic or noncyclical.

What are the Treatments for Breast Pain?

Prescription medications may be considered for women with severe breast pain that lasts longer than 3 months. These medications can include: tamoxifen, danazol, and Bromocriptine. In some cases, providers may recommend continuous dosing with birth control pills.

Talk to your provider about what treatment options may be appropriate for you based on your age, medical history, and other medications you are currently taking.

Integrative Medicine

Some people may try Vitamin E or evening primrose oil for breast pain. However, there is limited research to show these products are helpful. Talk to your provider about any supplements you are taking.

For more information please call your provider.



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Always follow your health care provider's instructions.