



Breast Lumps

Introduction

There are many reasons you might develop a lump in your breast. Finding a lump can be scary. Although most of these are harmless changes and do not need more follow up, sometimes a lump or change may be a cancer. It is important to have any new lump examined. Getting the news that this finding is benign (not cancer) can give you peace of mind. Finding and treating a new cancer early gives you the best chance of a continued healthy future.

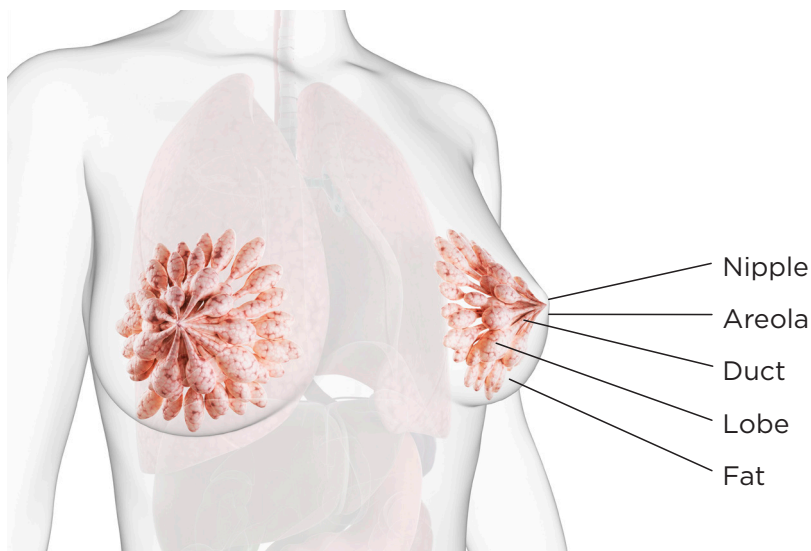
What Are Breast Lumps?

A breast lump can be a new mass or normal thickened tissue that forms in the breast. The shape and size of breast lumps can be different. Most breast lumps are not serious. You may notice a lump or your healthcare provider may notice a change (abnormality) during an exam or screening test. Many people have at least one breast lump in their lifetime.

Understanding Your Breasts

The breast is made up of lobules, ducts, and fat. Each breast has 15 to 20 sections called lobes. Each lobe has many smaller sections called lobules. These lobules have dozens of tiny bulbs that can make milk. The lobules, that make up the lobes, are linked by thin tubes called ducts.

Each breast also has blood vessels, lymph nodes and lymph vessels. The lymph vessels drain body fluid called lymph, an almost colorless fluid, between the lymph nodes. Lymph nodes are small bean-shaped structures that are found throughout the body. They filter body fluid and help fight infection and disease. Clusters of lymph nodes can be found in the axilla (underarm), around each breast, above the collarbone, and in the chest.



Normal Breast Changes

It is normal for your breasts to change at different stages of your life.

- **Puberty.** The breasts start to grow. Both breasts may not grow at the same rate, but they become more even in size over time. It is normal for breasts to be a little different in size.
- **Menstrual Cycle.** Changes in hormones may cause your breasts to feel different during or before your period. Your breasts may feel tender, swollen, or lumpy. After your period, these symptoms often go away. Birth control pills can make your breasts firmer and slightly larger.
- **Pregnancy.** During pregnancy, mammary glands enlarge to produce milk. This makes breasts larger and firmer. When breastfeeding ends, breasts return to their original size and may feel less firm.
- **Menopause.** As you get older, your breasts may become less firm. They also may not feel as lumpy, sore, or swollen. Being on hormone therapy may delay these changes.

Finding the Cause

History and Physical Exam

Your healthcare provider will complete a full medical history and physical exam. They may ask you questions such as when you first noticed the lump and if it has changed, whether you have had any breast problems before, if you have any family history of breast problems, and what medications you are currently taking.

Clinical Breast Exam

Your provider will visually examine your breast as well as use gentle pressure to feel for any lumps or changes in breast tissue.

Common Tests and Breast Imaging

- **Diagnostic Mammogram** is an x-ray of your breast tissue. A diagnostic mammogram is different from a screening mammogram. A diagnostic mammogram focuses on the area of concern and specific pictures are taken under the direction of a breast-trained radiologist.
- **Breast ultrasound** is an exam where an image of breast tissue is produced using sound waves. Ultrasound looks at the glandular tissue differently and is helpful to show the difference between fluid filled and solid parts in the breast.
- **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)** uses a strong magnet, radio waves, and imaging dye to make pictures of the whole breast and chest area. This provides additional information beyond the diagnostic mammogram and diagnostic breast ultrasound.

Benign Problems

Many breast lumps are not cancerous, meaning they are “benign”. Most benign breast changes do not need any treatment. Some may be helped with simple lifestyle changes or minimally invasive procedures.

- **Fibrocystic changes** can cause your breasts to feel lumpy, sore or tender and may be due to changes in hormones, such as during your menstrual cycle (period). These symptoms may be worse a week or 2 before your period.
- **Breast Cysts** are fluid-filled lumps in the breast tissue. Breast cysts can be soft or firm and vary in size. Cysts may get larger or more painful before your period. Most breast cysts do not need treatment and may go away on their own, while others may need to be drained with a very small needle.
- **Fibroadenoma** (fy-bro-ad-uh-NO-muh) is a type of tumor that is not cancer. They are most often found in younger women. A fibroadenoma is often round, rubbery, and movable.
- **Scar Tissue** in your breast may be a result of injury, trauma, previous surgery, or other causes.
- **Hematoma.** A hematoma (hee-mah-toe-mah) is a collection of blood under the skin. A hematoma is similar to a bruise. Most hematomas will heal on their own. A very large hematoma may need to be surgically removed.
- **Abscess.** An abscess is a collection of infected fluid in the breast tissue. An abscess may cause redness, swelling, pain, or fevers. Treatment may include draining (removing) the fluid from your body along with antibiotic therapy.

Biopsy

If you are recommended to have a biopsy of your breast lump, the two main types of biopsies used are image-guided and surgical (excisional) biopsies.

Image Guided Biopsy

There are different types of needle biopsies and aspirations (draining). The type of procedure that is performed depends on what imaging shows the abnormality best. These imaging options could be mammography, ultrasound or MRI.

- Core Needle Breast Biopsy— tissue samples are removed with a biopsy device. This is minimally invasive with only a small incision needed – no stitches. It can be performed with x-ray, ultrasound, or MRI guidance.
- Fine needle biopsy— is typically performed by a surgeon of a lump that is easy to feel.
- Cyst aspiration/biopsy— may be performed when it is determined the breast lump looks like a fluid filled cyst or is causing the patient pain. Biopsy can be done if there are concerning features.

Surgical (Excisional) Biopsy

Performed by a surgeon, a cut is made in the breast to remove all of the area of concern. This is sometimes called a lumpectomy. This type of biopsy is more invasive and usually requires stitches.

After Your Biopsy is Complete

Your results may be:

- Benign (not cancer)
- Benign (high risk finding that needs follow up or removal)
- Positive for breast cancer

If your results are anything other than benign, you may be referred for further testing and a surgical consult.

Symptom Management

Lifestyle Changes

- Limit caffeine. This may help lessen breast pain.
- Limit or avoid alcohol.
- Limit salt to help decrease swelling.
- Try go get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days.
- Wear a supportive bra.
- A hot or cold compress can help decrease tenderness or pain.

Medicine

- Tell your healthcare provider which medications you take. Certain medications can cause breast changes.
- Take an over-the-counter pain reliever. Ask your provider which option would be best for you.

Conclusion

If you find a lump or other changes in your breast, it does not always mean you have cancer. It does mean you need to see your healthcare provider.

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