

Understanding Breast Pain

Breast pain is very common. On its own, it is not usually a sign of a more serious issue such as cancer. Soreness or tenderness that comes and goes over time is normal.

Know your body and what feels normal for you.

What causes breast pain?

Normal changes in your body can affect how your breasts feel. Many of these changes are caused by hormones.

- **Before or during menstrual periods**, your breasts may feel painful, swollen, or tender because of extra fluid in your breasts.
- **During pregnancy and breastfeeding**, your breasts may feel sore as the glands that produce milk increase in number and get larger. Pain during breastfeeding can also be a symptom of a breast infection called mastitis, which can happen when a milk duct gets blocked.
- **As you approach menopause**, your hormone levels change. This can make your breasts feel tender, even when you are not having your period. Breast cysts are also more common in the years before menopause, and these can sometimes cause pain or tenderness.
- **After menopause**, you may have pain if you are taking hormone replacement therapy, blood pressure pills, or certain other medicines.

Breast pain at any age can be unrelated to medications or hormones. Fibromyalgia, musculoskeletal pain, and nerve pain can all affect the breast area. Pain can also come from an injury, an infection, a biopsy, or surgery.

Other common causes of breast pain include drinking too much caffeine, exercising more than usual, smoking cigarettes, or wearing a poorly fitting bra.

Does breast pain increase my risk of cancer?

While it is natural to be concerned that any pain is a sign of something serious, most conditions that cause breast pain do not affect your risk of breast cancer.

When should I see a doctor?

Talk with your doctor if you are worried about breast pain. It is especially important to see your health care provider when your pain:

- Is in a single spot
- Lasts for six weeks or more
- Does not come and go
- Does not change when you press on it

Your doctor can do an exam and order tests to find the cause of the pain.

You should also see a health care provider if you think you may have a breast infection. Although infections are most common during breastfeeding, they can happen to anyone.

Signs of a breast infection include:

- Red, tender, swollen, or hot breast
- Tender or swollen areas in the armpit
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher

Your doctor may need to drain the blocked duct or prescribe an antibiotic to treat the breast infection.