

# Breast Pain (Mastalgia)

Breast pain and tenderness are very common in women. Breast pain is most common in young and middle-aged women, but also sometimes occurs in older women.

## Cyclic Breast Pain

Cyclic (sik-lik) breast pain is related to the menstrual cycle. Normal monthly changes in hormones may cause breast pain. 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 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 - around the time of ovulation. The pain then gets better after the start of your period.

## Noncyclic Breast Pain

Noncyclic breast pain is common in women 30-50 years of age. The pain is not related to the menstrual cycle. 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.

## Causes of Breast Pain

Most of the time, it is not possible to identify the exact cause of breast pain. Things that may contribute to breast pain include:

- Reproductive hormones.
- Conditions like breast cysts, breast injury, and prior breast surgery.
- Medicines including certain hormonal medications, infertility treatments, birth control pills, and hormone replacement therapy.
- Women with large breasts may have breast pain, often along with neck, shoulder, and back pain.
- Things like a pulled muscle, skin injury, spinal conditions, heartburn, or chest pain may be felt as breast pain.

## When to See a Doctor

Breast pain is rarely a symptom of breast cancer. However, your doctor should check some breast pain. See your doctor if you have:

- Pain that lasts after your menstrual cycle (monthly period) is done.
- Pain after menopause (after your monthly periods have ended in middle age).
- Breast pain every day for more than 2 to 3 weeks.
- Pain felt in one specific area of your breast.
- Pain that keeps getting worse.

## Self-Care

- Wear a good supportive bra to reduce breast movements during the day. You may want to wear the bra while you sleep. Use a sports bra during exercise.
- Heat, such as from a heating pad or warm compresses can provide relief.
- For some women a cold compress helps.
- Reduce or eliminate the 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 levels 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?

In some cases, various supplemental hormones, hormone blockers, or vitamins and dietary supplements may lessen breast pain symptoms and severity for women. Ask your doctor about what treatment options might be appropriate for you based on your age, medical history, and other medications you are currently taking. Some examples are:

- **Prescription medications.** For example - birth control pills; bromocriptine; danazol; tamoxifen, or aromatase inhibitors such as anastrozole, and others.
- **Vitamin E.** This vitamin may lessen breast pain in women who experience breast pain that fluctuates during the menstrual cycle.

## Integrative Medicine

Evening Primrose Oil is an over-the-counter supplement that appears to change the balance of fatty acids in your cells, which may reduce breast pain. Talk to your doctor to ask if this supplement is safe for you to take.