

Breast pain

Breast Care Centre
Information for patients

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How common is breast pain?

Breast pain is very common in women of all ages. For example, about 2 out of 3 pre/post menopausal women will have it at some time in their lives. However, it is rarely a sign of a serious disease.

When does breast pain usually occur?

You may have breast pain that is linked to your menstrual cycle. The pain may start a few days before your period, or existing pain may be worse then. This is known as **cyclical breast pain**.

Your breasts may also feel lumpier than usual, and be tender and swollen, at this time. You may have a burning, prickling, stabbing or drawing-in pain. You may have pain in only one breast or in only one part of your breast. The pain can vary from mild to severe. It often goes away once your period starts.

However, you may have lasting pain in the breast that is not related to your menstrual cycle. This is known as **non-cyclical breast pain**.

Because the pain may not be present all the time, it can be difficult to tell if a particular treatment has worked. The pain may have got better on its own, or the treatment may have helped.

What if my pain is affecting my daily life?

If you have breast pain that is severe or long lasting, you may want to talk to your GP.

In many cases your GP will be able to reassure you that what you are feeling is normal, or you may be referred to the Breast Care Unit for assessment. Again the clinic doctor will

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probably be able to reassure you.

Some simple self-help measures may be advised. These include:

- making sure that you are wearing a well-fitting, supportive bra, for example, you may choose a high impact sports bra.
- reducing the amount of fat, particularly saturated fat, in your diet.
- reducing the amount of caffeine you have.

What treatments can I try?

- Simple pain-killers, such as paracetamol, may be needed from time to time.
- Topical anti-inflammatory gels, such as ibuprofen gel, can help. You do need to check with your doctor or pharmacist before using these.
- Evening Primrose Oil may help with the pain in some women, although there is little evidence to prove this. You do not need a prescription from your doctor for Evening Primrose Oil, as it can be bought from the chemist or supermarket.
- Very occasionally, the pain can be so bad that prescription drugs may be considered. Unfortunately, these drugs have side effects, so they are only suitable for use after a thorough discussion of the benefits and the potential risks.

Having breast pain does not raise your risk of breast cancer, but it is still important to be 'breast aware'. Report any changes in your breasts to your GP without delay.

Where can I get further information?

Breast Cancer Now

This organisation produces information about non-malignant (non-cancerous) breast conditions as well as having information about breast cancer.

Tel: 0808 800 6000

Website: breastcancer.org

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