

Breast Pain – What Does it Mean?

What is breast pain?

Breast pain (also known as mastalgia) is extremely common in women and often occurs with the menstrual cycle, however it can also occur at random. It is not usually associated with breast cancer. Most women with breast pain do not have worrisome findings on their mammogram or ultrasound. They can experience relief with simple treatments and breast pain typically goes away on its own.

Why do I have breast pain?

There are numerous causes for breast pain. Some are included in the list below:

- Hormonal changes
- Cysts or fibrocystic breasts (not cancer, a condition that may include irregular lumps or cysts, breast swelling or discomfort, sensitive nipples, and itching)
- Large breasts
- Ill-fitting or unsupportive bras
- Previous surgery or injury to the breast
- Caffeine
- Stress

Sometimes breast pain may actually be chest pain related to your heart, lungs, muscle, or bone. It may also be related to skin rashes. You should talk to your doctor if you are concerned about this kind of pain.

Breast cancer does not usually cause breast pain. Sometimes your doctors may not be able to find a cause for your breast pain.

When is breast pain concerning?

Breast pain is concerning when:

- It is located in one area (focal) and constant
- You can feel a lump in your breast
- You have nipple changes
- You have nipple discharge
- You have associated skin redness

Breast pain is not concerning if it is located in more than one area or if it comes and goes (especially with your menstrual cycle).

What would a mammogram or ultrasound find in my breasts?

If you have breast pain that is focal and constant, we may do a mammogram or an ultrasound depending on your age. You may not need any additional imaging after a mammogram if your breast pain is in more than one area and comes and goes. You should still get your yearly screening mammogram if you are 40 or older. Most of the time, these tests do not show anything worrisome. They may reassure us that there is no breast cancer, but you should still follow up with your doctor for any other recommendations.

What treatments are available for my pain?

You should talk to your doctor about what you can do to improve your breast pain.

Some things your doctor might tell you to do are:

- Wear a well-fitting, supportive bra.
- Keep a diary of foods and activities that might be associated with breast pain to help find the cause.



- Change your diet: eliminate caffeine, and eat less meat and dairy.
- Apply a warm compress to the breast.
- Exercise
- Certain supplements and vitamins may help with breast pain. Over-the-counter (OTC) pain medicines (like ibuprofen) or other prescription medicines may also help. You should talk to your doctor to make sure it is safe before starting any new medications.



When should I call my doctor?

If you have any questions or have breast pain that does not go away despite treatment, you should talk to your doctor. They may refer you to see a breast specialist. If you have any questions about your mammogram or breast ultrasound you may call the breast imaging department at (734) 936-4500.

Where can I learn more?

- **Breast Pain (Mastalgia)**
www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/tm6412spec
- **American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists**
<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/faqs/benign-breast-problems-and-conditions>

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