PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Breast Pain in Women Who Do Not Have a Diagnosis of Breast Cancer

This information explains common causes of breast pain and ways to manage it. It's meant for women who haven't been diagnosed with breast cancer.

About Breast Pain

More than half of all women have breast pain at some point in their life. Breast pain can be caused by many things, such as:

- **Your menstrual cycle (monthly period).** Some people have pain, swelling, or discomfort during the week before their period starts.
- **Your diet.** Caffeine (such as coffee, colas, and chocolate) can cause breast discomfort or make it worse.
- **Wearing a bra that doesn't fit well.** This is one of the most common causes of breast pain. Your bras might not fit well if you have lost or gained weight. If your bras are old, they may have stretched and lost their support.

- **Having large, heavy, or cystic (lumpy) breasts.**
- **New or strenuous exercise.** Common examples include running, upper body exercise, and weight lifting.

Having breast pain doesn't mean you have breast cancer. Breast pain isn't a common sign of breast cancer. However, it's best to contact your healthcare provider if you:

- Have pain in the left side of your chest.
- Notice a change in the size or shape of your breast(s).
- Have dimpling (like the texture of an orange) on the skin of your breast(s).
- Have a rash on your breast(s) or around your nipple(s).
- Notice an area of thickened tissue or a lump in your breast(s).
- Feel a lump or swelling in your armpit(s).
- Feel pain in your armpit(s) or breast(s) that isn't in the 1 to 2 weeks before your menstrual period.
- Have any discharge (liquid) coming from your nipple(s).
- Notice a change in how your nipple(s) look.

Ways to Manage Breast Pain

Breast pain can make you feel worried. It can also make it hard for you to sleep or do your usual activities. It's best to

talk with your healthcare provider if you're having breast pain. They can suggest ways to manage it. You can also try some of the ideas listed below.

- **Keep a pain diary.** This will help you keep track of your pain. You can use it to tell your healthcare provider exactly how you've been feeling. This will help them understand your pain better. Your nurse will talk with you about this.
- **Get professionally fitted for a bra.** This can help make sure your bras are the right size and are fully supporting your breasts.
- **Find out which part of your breast hurts.** Sometimes, pain can be caused by the underwire in your bra. Instead of buying a new bra, you can take the underwire out for a short time. To take the underwire out, open the seam and pull out the wire. You can put the underwire back in at a later time.
- **Sleep with your bra on.** This can help ease pain that's caused by the weight of your breasts.
- **Take an over-the-counter (OTC) anti-inflammatory medication, such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®).** Always check with your healthcare provider before taking any medications.
- **Stay at a healthy weight.** Breasts are often the first place

women tend to lose or gain weight. Keeping a healthy weight is best for your general health and breast health.

- **Exercise.** Try aerobic exercise. This is exercise that makes your heart beat faster, such as walking. It can help decrease pain, regulate stress, and increase overall well-being. Talk with your doctor before starting any exercise program.
- **Try a relaxation technique.** For example, you can try meditation, yoga, mindful breathing exercises, warm showers, or gentle stretching.

Additional Resources

MSK offers many different support services. Talk with your care team about which services may be best for you. They can also give you a referral, if needed.

Female Sexual Medicine and Women's Health Program
646-888-5076
The Female Sexual Medicine and Women's Health Program helps women who are dealing with sexual health challenges. For more information or to make an appointment, please call the number above.

Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service
646-449-1010
www.msk.org/integrativemedicine

The Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service offers many services to complement (go along with) traditional medical care, including music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy.

Exercise to Prevent Breast Cancer
(www.mskcc.org/pe/exercise_prevent_breast_ca)
This educational resource explains how exercise can lower your risk of getting breast cancer.

Healthy Eating to Reduce Your Risk for Breast Cancer
(www.mskcc.org/pe/eating_prevent_breast_ca)
This educational resource explains how to follow a healthy diet to lower your risk of getting breast cancer.

Resources, Clothing, and Support After Breast Surgery
(www.mskcc.org/pe/resources-clothing-support-breast-surgery)
This educational resource has information about shops that have a large selection of bras and offer custom bra fittings. The shops are online or located within New York City, Long Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Some of this information can be useful for people who haven't been diagnosed with breast cancer or had breast reconstruction surgery.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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