



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Breast Pain in Women Who Haven't Been Diagnosed With 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 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 that 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 distressed. 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 so you can 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 completely 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 temporarily take the underwire out by opening the seam and pulling out the wire.
- **Sleep with your bra on.** This can help relieve 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.** Aerobic exercise (exercise that makes your heart

beat faster, such as walking) 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

Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) offers many different support services. Talk with your healthcare team about which services may be best for you. They can also give you a referral, if needed.

Evelyn H. Lauder Breast Center Boutique

646-888-5330

The boutique has a large selection of bras and offers professional bra fittings.

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 Service

646-888-0800

www.mskcc.org/integrativemedicine

The Integrative Medicine Service offers many therapies to complement (go along with) traditional medical care. Some of these services include music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. Services are available to you, your family, your caregivers, and the general public. Many of these services (such as appointments with Integrative Medicine doctors, massages, acupuncture, and mind-body and fitness sessions) are available at the Evelyn H. Lauder Breast Center.

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.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

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

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