

Breast Tenderness

What is breast tenderness?

Breast tenderness is pain or discomfort in the breasts. It is the most common breast symptom women have. It is usually **not** a sign of breast cancer.

What is the cause?

The most common cause of breast tenderness is called fibrocystic breast changes. These changes are caused by the swelling of very tiny fluid-filled cysts in fibrous tissue in the breast. The changes usually happen in both breasts 7 to 10 days before your menstrual period. They begin to go away when your period starts and are usually gone by the time your period ends.

Other causes of breast tenderness include:

- Puberty (in boys as well as girls)
- Pregnancy (In the first part of pregnancy, your breasts and nipples can become very tender to the touch and easily irritated. Breast pain later in pregnancy may be due to the weight of breasts that have become enlarged and heavy.)
- Infection of the breast
- Hormone imbalance, especially too much estrogen
- Birth control pills
- Breast-feeding, when the breasts become full of milk (engorged)
- Injury of the breast
- A noncancerous tumor in the breast called a fibroma
- A condition called hyperprolactinemia, which means your body is producing a high level of the milk-producing hormone prolactin
- Breast cancer, but often cancer does not cause any pain

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine your breasts. Tests may include:

- A mammogram, which is a special X-ray of the breast
- Ultrasound, which uses sound waves to show pictures of the breast
- Thermography of the breasts, which is a heat test that outlines the breast in a color pattern
- A biopsy, which is removal of a small sample of tissue or fluid for testing
- Exam of discharge from a nipple
- Blood tests

How is it treated?

Often no medical treatment is needed. Your healthcare provider may recommend that you:

- Wear a bra that gives good support, especially if you exercise or have large breasts.
- Put heat on your breast with a covered warm water bottle, warm moist cloths, or a heating pad set at the lowest heat setting.
- Take nonprescription pain-relief medicine as recommended by your healthcare provider.
- Drink fewer or no beverages with caffeine.

In some cases your healthcare provider may prescribe hormones or other medicine. If you have an infection, take the antibiotic prescribed by your provider.

If you are having discomfort from pregnancy-related breast changes, you maybe able to find relief by using a well-fitting maternity bra. These special bras are available at most maternity clothing stores. Some suggestions for finding a maternity bra that is right for you include:

- The straps should be wide and should not stretch very much. Be aware that over time elastic straps may lose their ability to stretch and, therefore, lose their ability to provide support.
- The cup should comfortably hold the entire breast and should fit it in such a way that the nipple is about at the midway level between the elbow and shoulder while your arms are resting by your side.
- The bra should be adjustable so that it can allow for changes to the growing breasts during pregnancy.

Surgery is rarely needed. However, if you have a breast cyst, your healthcare provider may drain or remove it. If you have a fibroma, your healthcare provider may remove it.

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow your healthcare provider's recommendations for preventing and treating breast tenderness.
- Learn how to examine your breasts after your menstrual period every month. If you no longer have periods, examine your breasts at the same time each month, for example, on the first day of every month.
- If you notice that one breast is tenderer than the other, or there is redness of the skin over an area of breast tenderness, contact your healthcare provider.
- If you keep having problems with breast pain despite treatment, contact your healthcare provider.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.