

Fibrocystic Breast Changes

What are fibrocystic breast changes?

Fibrocystic breast changes are the most common cause of breast tenderness and breast lumps. Fibrocystic breast lumps are cysts, which are fluid-filled sacs surrounded by fibrous tissue. These cysts are not caused by cancer.

Fibroadenomas, another common cause of breast lumps, are solid lumps of fibrous tissue. They are not caused by cancer either.

What is the cause?

The cause of fibrocystic breast changes is not known. Estrogen and other hormones produced by the ovaries may play a role.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms are tenderness, enlargement, and lumpiness in the breast. These 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.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. 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
- Aspiration of a cyst (removal of fluid with a tiny needle)

Instead of any of tests, your healthcare provider may ask that you simply return for another exam in 2 to 6 weeks, depending on where you are in your menstrual cycle.

How is it treated?

There are a number of things you can do to try to relieve discomfort.

- Nonprescription drugs such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and aspirin may be helpful for pain. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, do not take for more than 10 days for any reason.
- Wear a well-fitting bra for support, especially when you are physically active.
- Use ice packs or heat to reduce or prevent symptoms.
 - Put an ice pack, gel pack, or package of frozen vegetables wrapped in a cloth on your breast every 3 to 4 hours for up to 20 minutes at a time.

- Put warm moist cloths, a hot water bottle, or heating pad on your breast. Cover the hot water bottle with a towel or set the heating pad on low so you don't burn your skin.

Some cysts can be treated in your healthcare provider's office by aspiration. In this procedure, you are given a shot of medicine to numb the area and then fluid in the lump is removed with a tiny needle and syringe

If your symptoms are severe, you may want to discuss with your provider the pros and cons of prescription medicine, such as hormones.

How long will the effects last?

The lumps may get larger or smaller over time. They may go away or become less noticeable after menopause. There is no known cure for these breast changes, but they are not harmful and rarely develop into breast cancer.

How can I take care of myself?

Always do monthly breast self-exams after your menstrual period. If you no longer have periods, examine your breasts at the same time each month, for example, on the first day of every month. Also have a yearly exam by your healthcare provider and get regular screening mammograms as advised by your provider.

Follow the treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider. Ask your provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I help prevent fibrocystic breast changes?

To try to help prevent fibrocystic breast changes, some healthcare providers advise avoiding food and beverages that contain caffeine, such as coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate. However, it is not clear that avoiding these foods will prevent symptoms.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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