

Breast Pain

Breast pain is also called mastalgia (pronounced muh-stal-juh) and is very common. It can be caused by many things, **but breast pain is not usually caused by cancer.**

There are two main types of breast pain.

1. Regular and repeating (cyclical) breast pain:

- Regular and repeating breast pain is often normal and can be caused by hormones in the body like estrogen.
- Cyclic pain can be felt in one or both breasts, but is usually felt throughout the breasts, not just one spot that can be pointed to with a finger.
- Cyclic pain usually starts a week or two before menstruation (a person's period) and stops after menstruation begins.
- Cyclic pain can also worsen before menopause (when you no longer get your period) or while using hormone replacement therapy.
- Normal fibrocystic breast changes (breast tissue that contains cysts) can be more tender just before menstruation.

2. Random (non-cyclical) breast pain:

- Random breast pain is not related to hormones or the menstrual cycle.
- Noncyclic pain can occur at different times and last for different lengths of time.
- Noncyclic pain can be caused by many things; medications, injury, caffeine, cysts, or infection can all cause noncyclic breast pain.
- Noncyclic pain may be located in one specific spot in the breast that can be pointed to with a finger.

Sometimes pain can be caused by things near the breast, such as your heart or soreness from the chest muscles.

To know which type of breast pain you are experiencing, it can be helpful to notice when and where it occurs over 1 to 2 months, but do not ignore pain that will not go away. Talk to your doctor about what you have noticed to decide together which type of pain you have and what might be causing it.

Ways to improve breast pain at home:

- Heating pad or ice packs.
- Eating a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables and limiting caffeine.
- Wear a supportive bra, such as a sports bra during the day and while you sleep.
- Exercise and lower stress if possible.
- Take pain medicine such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, if your doctor as said it is safe for you to take.

After talking to your clinician, you may decide together that medications could be helpful for you to try, or if breast imaging is needed.

Every person is different, so it is important to communicate openly with your clinician to decide the best plan for you.

Please seek medical attention right away if you notice the following signs of infection:

- Breast redness or swelling.
- Fever (temperature more than 100.5 F).
- Intense pain or a new lump that is not getting better.
- Discharge from your nipple or skin.

Questions?

The UNC Mammography Clinic can be reached at (984)-974-8762 if you have any questions.