



Education

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.

How does it occur?

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
- 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 breast cyst (a fluid-filled sac larger than the tiny cysts that cause fibrocystic breast changes)
- 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 health care provider will carefully examine your breasts. He or she may recommend other tests, such as:

- a mammogram (a special x-ray of the breasts)
- an ultrasound scan of the breasts (a scan with sound waves)
- thermography of the breasts (a heat test that outlines the breast in a color pattern)
- a biopsy (removal of a small piece of tissue or fluid from the breast).
- examination of discharge from a nipple
- blood test.

How is it treated?

There is a good chance you will not need any treatment. Treatments your health care provider may recommend are:

- Wear a bra that gives good support, especially if you exercise or have large breasts.
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- Put heat on your breast with a heating pad or warm water bottle.
- Take mild, nonprescription pain pills.
- Drink fewer or no beverages with caffeine. Avoid chocolate before your menstrual period.
- Take hormones or other medicine prescribed by your health care provider.
- If you have an infection, take the antibiotic prescribed by your health care provider.

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

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow your health care 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.

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