

# Breast Pain

## Breast Pain

### Should I Be Worried If My Breasts Hurt?

Breast pain – a common condition among women – can be accompanied by breast tenderness, heaviness, swelling, sharp shooting or burning pangs or tightness in breasts. The pain may range from mild to severe, it may be continuous or it may come and go periodically. More common in young women, breast pain may sometimes occur in older women after menopause. Mostly breast pain reflects a non cancerous condition and is not usually linked to breast cancer. However, pain that lasts for a couple of months or remains after menopause need to be assessed by a healthcare professional.



Breast pain may occur:

- For a few days a month before your period starts. This mild-to-moderate pain affecting both breasts is considered normal.
- For more than a week before and sometimes during your period. The pain affects both breasts and is moderate-to-severe
- During the month, unrelated to your period

**What are the features of the pain?**

Breast pain, in most cases, is categorized into either cyclic (breast pain linked to periods) or non-cyclic (breast pain not linked to periods). Also, the pain may have extramammary (outside the breast) origin. Each category has its distinct characteristics. It is significantly important to differentiate between the pain coming from the breast and pain that starts in the chest and radiates to your breast as the management of cyclic and non-cyclic breast pain are somehow similar, whereas, pain coming outside of breast requires different approach.

### **Cyclic Pain**

- The pain is clearly associated with your periods
- The pain is dull, achy and heavy
- Often your breasts may swell or become lumpy
- Typically the pain is located in upper and outer areas affecting both breasts, and can spread to the armpit
- The pain starts up to 2 weeks prior to your periods, get worse during the periods and then eases up when period ends
- More widespread in young women (around 20s and 30s) and older women (over 40s) approaching their menopause

### **Non-Cyclic Pain**

- The pain is not associated with the periods
- The pain feels like tightness, burning, or soreness
- The pain is continuous or irregular (unpredictable)
- Usually the pain affects a particular section of one breast, but may spread across the breast and chest
- Most commonly the pain affects women who passed their menopause

### **Extramammary Pain**

Extramammary pain, or pain coming outside the breast, may feel like it begins in the breast, but actually it is a referred pain from a different source. Most likely extramammary pain originates from muscle and bone problems and comes from sources, such as chest wall and spine. Also, the pain may be a result of a local injury or a complication of a medical procedure. However, the pain may reflect a medical condition related to internal organs, such as heart, lungs, gallbladder and oesophagus (gullet).

## **Reasons**

Various factors can cause breast pain. Some of the most common causes are:

### **1. Pregnancy**

One of the first signs of pregnancy is specific changes in breasts. In early stages of pregnancy your breasts may feel heavy, tender or swollen. Also your nipples may become more sensitive and larger, and the area around the nipple may get darker.

### **2. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)**

Premenstrual syndrome is a common condition among women that affects emotional, physical and behavioral aspects of the life, usually before 5 to 11 days prior to the periods. The symptoms of premenstrual cycle vary from woman to woman and from period to period, and may include fatigue, headaches, breast pain and many others.

### **3. Menopause**

Menopause is a normal and natural condition that every women experience with age. Usually it begins when a women is between 45 and 55, however menopause may occur outside of that age range. Women during the menopause may experience different symptoms, including night sweats, hot flashes, flushes, breast pain and other symptoms.

### **4. Breast Cancer**

Breast pain is not necessarily a sign of a breast cancer. Having a lump or pain in your breasts does not mean you have a cancer. However, if you have a continuous pain in a specific area of your breast that isn't related to your periods, you should see your doctor.

### **5. Breast Cysts**

Over the years, as woman get older, her breasts undergo certain changes called involution. Normally, during breast involution, the breast tissue is replaced by fat tissue. In some cases natural breast involution may end up with the development of fibrous tissue and cysts. Breast cysts are not always painful, however they may cause pain.

### **6. Mastitis**

Mastitis is the inflammation of the breast tissue, usually caused by infection via damaged nipple. This condition occurs mostly in women who are breast-feeding. Mastitis causes breast swelling, redness, enlargement, as well as breast and armpit tenderness, breast itching, feeling of warmth on the breast and fever.

### **7. Breast Duct Papilloma**

Breast Duct Papilloma, also called intraductal papilloma, is a small benign tumor formed in the milk duct of the breast. Most common in women from 35 to 55 years old, these benign tumors are typically made from fibrous tissue, gland tissue and blood vessels. The main symptoms of breast duct papilloma are nipple discharge, breast enlargement and breast lumps. Some women may experience breast pain and discomfort.

### **Ectopic Pregnancy**

Ectopic pregnancy occurs when the fertilized egg develops outside the uterus. Ectopic pregnancy is a medical emergency. The symptoms of ectopic pregnancy incorporate severe, sharp pain on the one side of the lower belly or pelvis that may radiate to the shoulder or neck, bleeding from vagina and dizziness. You should seek medical help immediately if you experience any of the above mentioned symptoms.

### **8. Other Causes**

Pain in breasts may be caused by several others factors, including:

- Breast Size
- Breast Surgery
- Diet
- Smoking
- Medications
- Injury
- Extramammary Reasons

## **What can I do to ease the pain?**

The management of breast pain is highly depends on whether the pain is related to your periods or not.

Management of cyclical pain or pain related to your periods includes:

- Taking nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) medications to ease the pain, such as ibuprofen or acetaminofen
- Adjusting contraceptive pills
- Correction of menopausal hormone treatment
- Taking Danazol to treat breast pain and tenderness, the only prescription medication that is approved by the Food and Drug Administration

If you breast pain is not related to your periods you should see your doctor. Before starting the treatment the doctor will consider the severity of the pain, your age, medical history, and perform clinical breast exam, trying to identify the cause. After your doctor may run some medical tests, such as mammogram, ultrasound, biopsy and many others in order to obtain the necessary information and prescribe specific related treatments.

## **Lifestyle and Home Remedies**

Although the effectiveness of the below-mentioned self-care measures, some may be helpful:

- Wear a bra with extra support
- Apply hot or cold compresses
- Wear a sports bra while exercising
- Try various relaxation therapies
- Limit your caffeine intake
- Follow a healthy and low fat diet
- Reduce your sodium intake

## **When to see a doctor?**

When you have a sudden breast pain with chest pain and tingling or numbness in your hands or legs, you should immediately seek for medical help, as those symptoms may reflect heart

attack.

Schedule an appointment with your doctor, if:

- The pain distracts you from your daily activities
- The pain lasts 2 weeks or longer
- You experience breast pain and can feel a lump in your breast
- The pain is located in a particular area of your breast
- The pain worsens with time