

Breast Pain and Tenderness

A Patient's Guide



Radiology Ltd.

Background

Breast pain is used as a general term to include sharp breast pain, breast discomfort, and breast tenderness. 70-80% of women experience breast pain and tenderness at some time in their life. Breast pain is the second most common symptom presented to health care providers (after breast lump). It is very rare for breast cancer to present as pain.

What causes it?

Most commonly, changes in hormone levels or changes in hormone sensitivity of the breasts are implicated. This may be due to changes in the menstrual cycle or medications taken. Infection and certain inflammatory changes may also cause breast pain.

Different types of breast pain

- **Cyclical Breast Pain:** By far the most common type of breast pain which is predominantly caused by hormones. This is non-focal pain and/or tenderness in one or both breasts, often accompanied by swelling, that comes and goes with the menstrual cycle. Pain is often most pronounced in the two weeks before your period. 20% of patients have spontaneous resolution within three months. Most have decreasing severity of pain over time. 60% have recurrent pain within two years. Some women have increasing severity of symptoms until menopause, at which time about 40% experience resolution.
- **Noncyclical Breast Pain:** The next most common type of breast pain. Predominantly inflammatory causes. May also follow trauma, a biopsy, surgery, or can be associated with large, poorly supported breasts. Usually affects one breast and is more focal than cyclical breast pain. May be worse in cold weather. Usually shorter duration than cyclical breast pain with spontaneous resolution occurring in up to 50% of patients.
- **Extramammary Pain:** Pain from outside the breast may be misinterpreted as breast pain. This may be caused by many conditions involving the chest wall muscles, nerves and bones, as well as organs within the chest or abdomen.

Management

After obtaining normal findings on clinical examination and imaging studies, management is aimed at symptomatic relief.

- **Support garments:** A well-fitting brassiere to better support the breasts
- **Compresses:** Some women obtain relief from warm or cold compresses and/or gentle massage
- **Medications:**
 - Tylenol or other oral pain medications
 - Topical pain relieving gels have been proven in clinical trials to give relief such as Voltaren, Aspercreme and Nuprin

There is no clear evidence to support the elimination of caffeine, taking Vitamin E or Evening Primrose Oil to reduce pain, however some women have claimed this is helpful.



How do I get my results?

After your study, the images will be evaluated by one of our board-certified radiologists. A final report will be sent to your doctor or healthcare provider, who can then discuss the results with you in detail.

Reports are also available on Radiology Ltd.'s patient portal:

[MyRad.](#)

For more information or to schedule an exam, please contact Centralized Scheduling at (520) 733-7226 or visit our website at www.radltd.com.

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