

# Breast Pain



**BreastScreen ACT**

 **13 20 50**

**Belconnen | Phillip | City**

A program of



**ACT**  
Government

*BreastScreen*  
**AUSTRALIA**

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Program

Breast pain is also known as mastalgia. Many people will experience breast pain during their lives. Breast pain alone is rarely a sign of breast cancer.

## How common is breast pain?

- Many people will have breast pain during their lives.
- We often think pain is a sign something is wrong and it may be serious, but this is rarely the case with breast pain.
- Breast pain can vary from mild to severe. Some people feel an ache, while others feel a stabbing or burning sensation.
- Breast pain alone is rarely a sign of breast cancer.

## What are some of the causes of breast pain?

- hormone changes
- injury to the breast
- pregnancy
- inflammation
- weight gain
- simple breast cysts
- poorly fitting bra
- some forms of hormone replacement therapy
- infection of the breast (mastitis).

## Are there different types of breast pain?

Breast pain (known as mastalgia) can be 1. cyclic and 2. non-cyclic breast pain.

### Cyclic breast pain

This is the most common type of breast pain and is linked to your menstrual cycle. The pain may be related to your breast tissue being more sensitive than usual because of changes in your hormone levels. The pain can be different in each breast.

Generally, the pain occurs 3 – 7 days before menstruation, although some people may feel tenderness starting in the middle of their cycle at the time of ovulation. This tenderness can go on for two weeks until menstruation starts.

**If you notice a new breast symptom or change in your breasts you should discuss this with your GP.**

### Non-cyclic breast pain

Non-cyclical breast pain is not related to your menstrual cycle.

Often no cause can be found for this type of breast pain.

In some cases, it can be caused by benign breast changes such as cysts, fibroadenomas, and age-related changes in the milk ducts under the nipple.

Non-cyclic breast pain:

- is often described as burning, drawing, achy and sore
- usually affects women aged in their 40s – 50s
- can come and go
- tends to be one sided and in one section of the breast.

Breast pain can also be a side effect of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

## **Are there other types of pain that can be mistaken for breast pain?**

Pain may be felt in the region of the breast but may start from somewhere else. This type of pain usually involves bones, joints or muscles and is called musculoskeletal pain.

- Pain in the chest wall or spine may cause discomfort in the breast.
- Arthritis or a pinched nerve in the neck may cause breast pain.
- Other forms of illness such as shingles, pneumonia or gall stones may cause breast pain.

**If you notice a new breast symptom or any changes in your breasts you should discuss this with your GP.**

## **Pain during screening mammography**

Some people feel pain and/or discomfort during a mammogram. To get a clear picture and to reduce radiation exposure, the breast is positioned and compressed between two flat plates. This can be uncomfortable, but the compression only lasts a few seconds. You can ask to stop the mammogram at any time.

If your breasts become tender at a particular time during your menstrual cycle, you may find it more comfortable to have a mammogram at a different time in your cycle.

## **Tips to relieve breast pain**

Some suggestions that may relieve pain include:

- choosing a supportive bra that fits correctly to lessen the movement of your breasts on your chest wall—this is especially important if you have fuller breasts or are doing exercise
- visiting a person trained in fitting bras to ensure you are wearing the correct size and type of bra—bras with an under-wire can cause discomfort for some people

- wearing a soft support bra for sleeping
- simple pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can help with breast pain—take these medicines following the instructions on the packet
- see your GP to talk about other ways to manage breast pain
- keeping a record of your breast pain for a couple of months to see if there is a pattern
- marking the days when you have pain
- if you are still menstruating, mark when your menstruation starts
- recording other details such as any changes in your diet and any stressful events.

## Points to remember:

Many people will experience breast pain during their lives.

Breast pain alone is rarely a sign of breast cancer.

If you are concerned about any breast pain, please talk to your GP.

Your GP may perform a clinical breast examination and refer you for further tests such as a diagnostic mammogram and/or ultrasound of your breast.

### Acknowledgement of Country



Canberra Health Services acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution to the life of this region.



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