

Breast Tenderness

How common is breast tenderness?

- Breast tenderness is very common. Seven out of 10 women feel it during their lives.
- In most cases, breast tenderness is not breast cancer. If you have breast tenderness and are not sure why, please visit your doctor.

Why do women have breast tenderness?

- It can be caused by your monthly cycle (cyclical pain). The amount of pain you feel can vary from month-to-month. This may continue until menopause. After menopause, women who take hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may still have this kind of breast tenderness.
- It can be caused by something other than your monthly cycle (non-cyclical pain). This type of pain occurs more often in older women. Breast pain may be in both breasts, only in one breast or only in one part of a breast. It may occur in the armpit. You may feel it all the time, or it may appear and disappear with no pattern.
- It can be caused by muscles in your chest (chest wall pain). This is not really breast pain. It is pain in the muscles or other tissues under your breast, in the chest wall. This type of breast tenderness may be from arthritis. It can also be caused by exercise. It does not change with your monthly cycle.

What can you do for breast tenderness?

Follow these breast screening guidelines:

- Know how your breasts look and feel. Look and feel for changes. If you notice any changes, visit your doctor.
- Have a physical breast exam by a doctor or nurse as part of your regular health check-up.
- If you are 50 or older, go for your regular mammogram at the Ontario Breast Screening Program.

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What else can you do?

- Keep a written record of your breast tenderness, and how severe it is. Also keep a written record of your monthly cycle. See if the two match each other.
- Make sure your bra is the correct size. It should fit well and provide enough support.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about pain medicine that could help.
- If you take hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and have breast tenderness, talk to your doctor about your HRT dose.
- A Canadian study found that women who took two tablespoons of crushed flaxseed (not flaxseed oil) each day for 3 months had less cyclical breast tenderness. If you try this, it is important to talk to your pharmacist or doctor to make sure the flaxseed will not affect other drugs you are taking.
- Caffeine does not cause breast pain, yet some women find they have less pain when they reduce caffeine. No studies support this link. Caffeine is found in coffee, black and green teas, cola drinks, chocolate, cocoa, and common cold and pain medicines sold in drug stores (without a prescription).
- Studies do not prove that Vitamin E and B6 or Evening Primrose Oil help in the treatment of breast pain.
- If your breast tenderness continues or if you are worried about an area of tenderness, visit your doctor or nurse practitioner.

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