



Breast Concerns

Normal Breasts

Breasts come in all shapes and sizes. Breasts are made up of fatty tissue and many milk-producing glands. Normal breasts can be lumpy and sore around the time of your period. Having one breast that is slightly smaller than the other (asymmetry) is also common.

Breast Lump

Most breast lumps are due to normal changes in the breast tissue that occur during puberty. Nearly all breast lumps are benign (noncancerous) under age 21. Breast lumps are common and can be caused by the hormonal changes of your monthly menstrual cycle, a cyst, an infection or a benign tumor called a fibroadenoma. Lumps can be smaller than a pea or grow quite large. If you notice a new lump in your breast that does not disappear after your period, you should make an appointment to have a breast exam with your healthcare provider. A breast lump can be solid, soft, or fluid filled. Sometimes, an ultrasound is ordered to find out what kind of lump it is. Most of the time your lump will go away on its own or you may need to be examined regularly without any special treatment. In young people, a fibroadenoma is the most common solid non-cancerous breast lump found on ultrasound. Rarely, large or rapidly growing lumps need to be removed by surgery.

Cysts

Cysts are small round or oval sacs filled with fluid and can be quite tender to touch. They may come and go with your period and are often most tender around your period. Your healthcare provider may order an ultrasound to make sure it is a cyst. In rare cases, when a cyst is very large or painful, your provider may use a needle to remove the fluid inside of the cyst. These types of cysts are more common as you get older.

Nipple Discharge

Nipple discharge can be related to fibrocystic breast changes and often appears yellow to green. When the discharge is clear or milky it may be a sign of a hormone problem. Some medications can cause this as well. When the discharge is green, black or even bloody it may be caused by a narrowing or blockage of the duct. Usually, red discharge is a sign of injury, infection or noncancerous tumor. Your healthcare provider may examine the fluid under the microscope or order blood tests to get more information.

Fibrocystic Changes

It is believed that 80% of people who have breasts have some degree of fibrocystic changes. Symptoms of fibrocystic breasts include tenderness, fibrous or rubbery tissue, thickening of tissue and sometimes a round, fluid filled cyst. These changes are related to hormone fluctuations. Your healthcare provider may recommend using a hormonal birth control to make your symptoms better.

Breast Pain

Breast pain is common. Breasts are often sore the week before your period. Breast pain can be treated with medications like acetaminophen or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), like ibuprofen. A well-fitted bra with adequate support can also help with breast pain. Hormonal birth control may be helpful for symptoms. Caffeine may make breast pain worse. Decreasing how much caffeine you drink may help.

Breast Infections (Mastitis/Abscess)

When a breast is infected, it can be red, warm, swollen and painful. You may have a fever. This is called mastitis and a deeper infection is called a breast abscess. Breast infections are more common in those who are breastfeeding. Common causes of breast infections include hair removal, injury and piercings. Antibiotics are used to treat these infections. If there is an abscess or the antibiotics are not working, it may need to be drained by your healthcare provider. You can prevent infections by avoiding trauma and keeping your nipples clean and dry. Nipple piercings can be dangerous because they have a high risk of infection. If you have a nipple piercing, you should be immunized against tetanus. Please contact your healthcare providers about risks of infections such as hepatitis and HIV. Infections due to piercings require prompt treatment with antibiotics and/or surgery. If you think you have a breast infection, see your healthcare provider right away.

Breast Health Tips

A well-fitting bra can help prevent back, shoulder and neck pain. Using sport bras and anti-chafing lubricant can help athletes who have soreness of their nipples from friction. It can be helpful to know how your breasts normally look and feel so you can tell if there are changes later in life. Speak to your healthcare provider to get more information about breast exams.