

BREAST PAIN or tenderness is common in women of all ages, from adolescents to older women. While it can be frightening to discover a new breast problem, most breast pain is not caused by breast cancer.

The most common type of breast pain is caused by the hormones that control the menstrual period. These hormonal changes can cause pain in both breasts several days before the menstrual period begins. Because the pain can come and go with the menstrual cycle, it is called “cyclical” breast pain. Cyclical breast pain is rarely caused by breast cancer or other serious breast problems.

Less commonly, a woman can have breast pain that does not occur with the menstrual cycle (also called noncyclical breast pain). This type of pain is not

related to the menstrual cycle and might occur in only one breast or one area of the breast. Noncyclical breast pain can be caused by a problem outside the breast, such as muscle or connective tissue strain, skin injury, spinal conditions, or problems in another organ system (e.g., *heart burn, chest pain*). Noncyclical pain can also be caused by noncancerous breast conditions such as a fibroadenoma or a cyst. Noncyclical breast pain is caused by breast cancer in only a very small percentage of women. Breast pain in one spot, associated with a lump or mass, should always be evaluated.

Pain that worsens with exertion and is relieved by rest should be evaluated by a primary care provider promptly to determine if the pain could be related to a heart condition.

The Regions Breast Health Center suggests following up with your primary care provider or the Breast Health Center nurse practitioner. After discussion of your symptoms, your provider or the nurse practitioner may suggest trying one or more of the following treatments:

- Pain relief medicines, such as acetaminophen (*Tylenol® and others*) or ibuprofen (*Advil®, Motrin®, and others*)
- Decrease the dose or stop taking medicines that contain estrogen (*after a discussion with your health care provider*)
- Wear a well-fitted support or sports bra
- Consider making changes to your diet – elimination of caffeine and a low-fat, high complex carbohydrate diet is helpful for some women

Some women have found dietary supplements such as evening primrose oil (*1,000 mg three times a day*) and vitamin E (*1,200 IU daily*) used alone or in combination for 6 months effective in the relief of breast pain. Iodine (*6 mg daily for 6 months*) may also be effective. It is important to check with your provider or pharmacist before starting any dietary or herbal supplements because they may interfere with your prescription medications.

Linda Christinsen-Rengel, APRN, CNP, in the **Region’s Breast Health Center**, is a women’s health care nurse with a special interest in helping women who are dealing with breast pain or other breast health issues. To schedule a consultation with Linda, call **651-254-4600**.