

BREAST PAIN

PAIN in your breast doesn't necessarily mean something is wrong. It is important to remember that pain is rarely the first sign of breast cancer. However, it should not be ignored.

IS BREAST PAIN COMMON?

Breast pain is one of the most commonly reported symptoms.

IS ALL BREAST PAIN THE SAME?

No! Pain can be constant or intermittent. It can occur regularly (for example, at certain times during your menstrual cycle) or randomly. Pain can be dull, sharp, or burning. You may be able to pinpoint it to a single location, or it may involve the entire breast. Pain may start in one location and move to another. It may get better or worse with certain positions or activities.

WHAT CAUSES BREAST PAIN?

It can often be difficult to identify a clear cause of breast pain. Contributing factors include hormone levels, breast structural changes (including cysts or prior trauma), medications (including certain oral contraceptives), breast size, a poorly fitting bra, and prior breast surgery (including lumpectomy, breast reduction, or implants). Sometimes pain may actually be from nearby muscles, bones, or lungs.

WHY HAS MY DOCTOR ORDERED A DIAGNOSTIC MAMMOGRAM AND/OR ULTRASOUND?

For pain that is constant and that can be localized to a specific area in the breast, imaging plays an important role in detecting benign (not cancerous) causes of pain. For example, breast cysts, small pockets of fluid in the breast, are one of the more common causes of pain. If a breast cyst is causing pain, it may be possible to perform a cyst aspiration (removal of fluid) for relief of symptoms.

MY MAMMOGRAM/ULTRASOUND ARE NORMAL. WHAT NOW?

You are not alone. Most mammograms/ultrasounds performed for pain are normal. Follow up with your doctor to determine if any further testing is required. Consider keeping a pain "diary" to determine if pain is occurring during certain times or after certain activities. Consider changing to a more supportive bra. There is limited evidence to suggest that caffeine contributes to breast pain, so try cutting back on coffee, tea, or soda. If pain increases or becomes associated with other breast problems (lumps, skin changes, nipple discharge), tell your doctor.