

Breast Pain

Breast pain is often caused by “fibrocystic disease”, particularly when it is associated with lumpiness. Since more than 90% of women experience breast pain and/or lumpiness during their adult lives, it is often called fibrocystic breast changes. Although many women with breast pain (mastalgia) become fearful that they may have cancer, it is usually unrelated to anything serious.

What causes mastalgia?

The most common cause is stimulation of milk glands, usually by an imbalance of the female hormone estrogen and progesterin, either from your ovaries, oral contraceptives, or hormone replacement therapy. This type of mastalgia is usually worse prior to menstrual periods. Caffeine intake also seems to stimulate breast tissue in many women. Other common causes of mastalgia are cysts, benign-fluid filled masses, infection, dilated milk ducts, (a condition called “duct ectasia”), pressure from underwire bras, or strain on ligaments in very large breasts.

It is uncommon for breast tumors to be responsible for mastalgia. Malignant tumors (cancers) only present with pain 20% of the time. This is why women are urged to practice monthly breast exam (BSE), to detect a tumor that may be painless and otherwise go undetected.

What to do if you have mastalgia

For many women, premenstrual mastalgia is normal and bearable, although uncomfortable. If mastalgia is new or increasing, you may get relief from one or more of the following:

- Abstain from caffeine. Caffeine is in coffee, tea, most soft drinks, chocolate and many medicines
- Oil of Evening Primrose 500mg twice daily
- Take Advil, Motrin, or Aleve according to dosage information on the bottle when you experience pain, unless you are allergic to these medications. The medicines are anti-inflammatory as well as analgesic.