

Suggestions for Treating Breast Pain

How common is breast tenderness?

- Breast tenderness is very common: 7 out of 10 women feel it at some point in their life.
- In most cases, breast tenderness is not breast cancer. There is no evidence that breast pain leads to an increased breast cancer risk.

Why do women have breast tenderness?

Breast tenderness can be caused by:

- Your monthly cycle – **cyclical pain** – as breast tissue is sensitive to changes in hormone levels. This may continue until menopause. After menopause, women who take hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may still have this kind of breast tenderness.
- Something other than your monthly cycle – **non-cyclical pain**. This type of pain occurs more often in older women. 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 of the time, or it may come and go with no pattern. Non-cyclical pain is very common around menopause.
- Arthritis, strain or exercise, which may impact muscles or other tissues under your breast in the **chest wall**.

Suggestions for treating breast pain:

Changing habits and breast support

- Smoking is related to breast pain, especially cyclical breast pain. We strongly recommend quitting or cutting down on cigarette use.
- Breast size and shape changes over time. Make sure you are wearing a supportive bra that fits you well. Bra boutiques can provide a bra fitting free of charge, check if your bra fits you properly, and can suggest styles to provide the best support for your shape.
- Try sleeping in a sports bra to keep breasts supported, especially if you're a side sleeper.

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Medications

- Anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen (e.g. Advil, Motrin, Aleve) or acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol) can be taken as needed.
- Voltaren gel (topical diclofenac), which is another type of anti-inflammatory medication, can be applied directly to the breast up to 4 times per day as needed for up to 4 weeks.
- Reducing the hormonal effects on your breast tissue may be achieved by:
 - Using hormone-blocking medications, e.g. Tamoxifen,
 - Taking your oral contraceptive pill continuously
 - Changing your hormone replacement therapy

Low risk supplements

- **Flaxseed:** A Canadian study found that women who added two tablespoons of crushed flaxseed into their diet each day for 3 months had less cyclical breast pain.
- **Molecular iodine:** In a study, some women who took 6 milligrams per day orally of molecular iodine for 3 months noticed improvement in their breast pain. Others did not notice a difference. It can be obtained at a supplement store.

These are suggestions only. They have helped to ease breast pain for some women but may or may not be of benefit to you depending on your particular case.

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