

What is breast pain?

A large number of women will experience breast pain of some sort during their lives. Breast pain alone, in the absence of any other abnormality, such as a lump, is virtually NEVER an indicator of breast cancer. The pain can come and go and improve as you get older.

Most women do not need any specific treatment. Surgery is unlikely to help with breast pain.

There are 3 types of pain:

Cyclical breast pain

This pain is linked to the changes in hormones during your menstrual cycle (periods). We know that oestrogen and progesterone levels vary during your menstrual cycle, but we do not know what causes the pain.

The pain usually affects the upper, outer area of both breasts and can sometimes be felt in the arms. It can vary from a dull ache to a burning or stabbing sensation. In most women it starts one to three days before your period begins, and improves at the end of your period.

Evening Primrose Oil can help with this type of pain (Do not take Evening Primrose Oil if you have epilepsy).

Wearing a supportive, well-fitting bra (a sports bra when exercising) and taking painkillers may also improve your symptoms.

Non -cyclical breast pain

Is breast pain that is not linked to your menstrual cycle. Many cases of non-cyclical pain have no identifiable cause and the pain can come and go. The pain is sometimes caused by other conditions, including:

- mastitis – a condition that can be related to breastfeeding and causes the breast tissue to become painful and swollen

- breast lumps – there are many benign (non-cancerous) causes of breast lumps, some of which may be painful
- breast abscess – a painful collection of pus that forms in the breast

Although it is rare, non-cyclical breast pain can also be caused by other medications and treatments, such as:

- some antifungal medicines
- some antidepressants
- some antipsychotics, used to treat mental health conditions

Smoking and caffeine (tea, coffee, coco-cola - try decaffeinated brands) are thought to sometimes cause non-cyclical breast pain.

Non breast pain

Pain which starts in the ribs, chest or back rather than the breasts.

Anti-inflammatory medications can help this type of pain.

What can you do to help my breast pain?

The doctor will examine your breasts and if it is felt necessary will do some tests (ultrasound, mammogram or Fine Needle Biopsy).

Once we are sure that you do not have any other problems with your breasts we will discuss with you some simple treatments. There is usually something that will work for most women although there is not one thing that will work for everyone.

You may be reassured by that your breast pain is not due to a more serious condition and find the discomfort easier to live with.

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What can I do to help my breast pain?

You may wish to try:

- Low fat / Low caffeine diet
- Wearing a supportive, well-fitting bra
- Paracetamol
- Evening Primrose Oil
- Other medications may be prescribed by your doctor

Recording breast pain

You may be asked to complete a breast pain chart. The chart can be used to confirm your diagnosis and to plan appropriate treatment.

You can use a breast pain chart to record whether your breast pain on a particular day is mild, moderate or severe.

The chart has a series of small boxes with the month and date next to each one. You fill in the box for each day of the month to indicate the level of pain that you have. This is usually done for at least two months. Please bring this chart to clinic with you. We can then make a specific plan for you depending on the type of pain you are having.

If you do have any further questions or concerns please ask your doctor or the clinic nurse.

Please record the amount of breast pain you experience each day by shading in each box as illustrated. For example: If you have severe pain on the 5th day of the month, then shade in completely the square under 5. Please note the day your period starts with the letter P.

	■ Severe pain						☒ Mild pain								● No pain						P Period										
Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Pain																															
Period																															
Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Pain																															
Period																															
Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Pain																															
Period																															

Contact us

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Monday – Friday 8am to 4.30pm

Phone (04) 8060 358 (Nurse's answerphone)

Kenepuru Hospital

Please phone the Wellington Hospital contact

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