

Fibrocystic breast changes

Have you ever felt a bumpy texture or “lumpiness” in your breasts? This lumpiness, plus tenderness or pain at certain times of the month, is called *fibrocystic* [FI-bro-sis-tic] *breast changes*. These changes are a normal part of the menstrual cycle. You are most likely to notice them in the premenstrual phase of your cycle, or when taking hormones if you are past menopause. Fibrocystic changes do not increase your chance of getting breast cancer. However, a breast change that should be checked is one that does not change with your cycle. Any persistent lump or thickening should be checked by your health care provider.

Have you found a new breast lump?

Do not panic, but have it checked by a health care provider. Even if you have had cysts or fibroadenomas in the past, do not assume that a new lump will be the same. The lump may not turn out to be cancer, but it is best to make sure.



Warning signs you need to know

See your health care provider if you notice any of these breast changes:

- lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast or underarm area
- swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast
- change in the size or shape of the breast
- dimpling or puckering of the skin
- itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
- pulling in of the nipple or other parts of the breast
- nipple discharge that starts suddenly
- new pain in one spot that does not go away

Certain breast problems, such as infections, nipple discharge or itchy nipples are not usually cancer, but can look just like symptoms of some rare types of breast cancer.

On the other hand, inflammatory breast cancer often appears with swelling and redness of the breast without a distinct lump. It is sometimes mistaken for an infection.

No matter what the diagnosis, if you feel that something is wrong, ask for a biopsy or get a second opinion. After all, no one knows your body better than *you*.

Benign breast problems

Many breast problems — such as a breast lump, breast pain or infection — are usually benign (non-cancerous). All the same, if you have any of the breast changes listed below, be sure to have your breasts checked by your health care provider.

Types of breast changes	Found most often in...	Relationship to cancer
Cyst a fluid-filled sac that feels like a lump or a tender spot	women ages 30 to 50 postmenopausal women taking hormones	typically is not cancerous does not increase your chance of getting breast cancer in the future
Fibroadenoma [FI-bro-ad-eh-NO-ma] a smooth, rubbery or hard lump that moves easily within the breast tissue	teenagers and younger women African American women sometimes found in postmenopausal women taking hormones	typically is not cancerous if the lump contains certain types of cells, you may have a greater chance of developing breast cancer a rare type of cancer that occurs in less than one percent of fibroadenomas
Cyclical breast tenderness that varies over the menstrual cycle	menstruating women postmenopausal women taking hormones	not associated with breast cancer
Non-cyclical constant pain in one spot that does not vary over the monthly cycle	women of all ages and ethnicities	often from a new or enlarging cyst
Non-breast-origin pain in the chest wall or ribs under the breast	women of all ages and ethnicities	not related to breast cancer, but may be another medical problem that should be checked

Resources

Susan G. Komen for the Cure®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org
See topic: Benign Breast Conditions

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Biopsy
- Breast Cancer Detection
- Breast Imaging Methods
- Mammography
- When You Discover a Lump or Change

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