

# CYCLICAL BREAST PAIN



## How common is breast pain

Breast pain is very common in women of all ages. Approximately two out of three pre-menopausal women (women who haven't been through the menopause/change of life) will experience it at some time in their lives.

**Breast pain indeed causes anxiety and many women think it is associated with breast cancer. Breast pain alone is usually not a sign of breast cancer. In fact, most women with early stages of breast cancer present with a painless lump.**

## What are the types of breast pain?

There are two main types of breast pain, both of which can be treated. Breast pain that's part of a woman's normal menstrual cycle is known as cyclical breast pain. Women may experience it as discomfort and lumpiness in their breasts a week or so before their period.

The pain can vary from mild to severe and breasts can also be tender and sore to touch. It often goes away once the period starts.

Other women can have lasting pain in the breast that's not related to their menstrual cycle or is actually coming from elsewhere in the body. This is known as non-cyclical breast pain.

## What causes cyclical breast pain?

Although cyclical breast pain is linked to the menstrual cycle, its exact causes aren't known. Pain can also be associated with starting to take the contraceptive pill, certain anti-depressant drugs and herbal remedies, or stress.

Cyclical breast pain is linked to changing hormone levels during the menstrual cycle and mainly affects women who haven't been through the menopause. These hormonal changes make the breast tissue more sensitive, which in turn can cause breast pain.

It can affect either one or both breasts and can spread to the armpit, down the arm and to the shoulder blade.

This type of pain often stops after the menopause when the ovaries stop working. However, women who are taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after their menopause can also experience breast pain. This is because the HRT keeps hormones at a pre-menopausal level.

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## What is the treatment for cyclical breast pain?

Abnormality within the breast should always be ruled out before treating the breast pain. A Triple Assessment should be performed, which includes Clinical breast examination by a Specialist, Mammogram (X ray of the breasts) and Breast ultrasound.

Reassurance that breast pain is a perfectly normal part of monthly cycle forms a significant component of Treating Breast pain. In the first place, simple things can be tried, such as reducing intake of caffeine, chocolate and red wine, increasing the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables you eat, and taking regular exercise to help maintain a healthy weight.

Simple measures like wearing a correctly fitted and well supporting bra day and night helps many women. Some women find relaxation therapy, such as relaxation tapes, useful in reducing the symptoms of cyclical breast pain. Other complementary therapies that promote wellbeing, such as acupuncture and aromatherapy, may also be helpful. If breast pain has started when coinciding with starting taking the contraceptive pill, changing to a low-dose pill or a different brand may help. If the pain continues, a non-hormonal method of contraception such as condoms or a diaphragm (cap) may be used.

Although widely used, there is very little evidence to support use of gamolenic acid (Evening primrose oil capsules) to treat breast pain. In fact, the vast majority do not find this treatment useful.

## Anti-inflammatory medicines

Research has shown that non-steroidal anti-inflammatory painkillers, such as ibuprofen, can help with breast pain.

These are particularly effective in creams/gels applied directly to the affected area, or they can be taken in tablet form. However, before considering using this type of painkiller, it is important for the lady to be assessed and advised by a Specialist on the correct dose, duration & for and any possible side effects.

## Tamoxifen

If pain is severe and prolonged and hasn't improved with any of the suggestions already mentioned, the Specialist might want to consider starting on a hormone drug.

The drug in this category which is sometimes used to treat breast pain is tamoxifen at half dose for a short period of time.(this drug commonly used to treat breast cancer. These may be many side effects... so they are only suitable for use following a thorough discussion of the benefits and the potential risks with the doctor. Once again the Specialist advice must be obtained regarding dose & duration

