

Nipple Discharge: A Patient Guide

➤ What is nipple discharge?

- Nipple discharge is fluid that comes out of the nipple, either on its own (spontaneous) or when the breast is squeezed.
- Nipple discharge is very common: ~5–10% of women report it at some point
- It is the third most common breast symptom after breast pain and palpable areas of concern (lumps).

➤ Is nipple discharge concerning?

- **Most causes of nipple discharge are not cancer**, but it can sometimes be a sign of a breast problem that needs further evaluation.
- Nipple discharge can be classified as Physiologic (benign, requiring no further evaluation) or Pathologic (concerning, requiring further evaluation) discharge

➤ What can it look like or feel like?

Physiologic Discharge

- ❖ Often from both breasts
- ❖ Usually happens with squeezing or stimulation
- ❖ Fluid may be milky, green, yellow, or cloudy white
- ❖ Can be caused by medications, hormonal changes, pregnancy, or breastfeeding



Pathologic Discharge

- ❖ Usually from one breast only
- ❖ Usually spontaneous (occurs without squeezing)
- ❖ Fluid may be bloody, clear, or watery
- ❖ May be associated with a breast lump or skin changes



➤ Do I need breast imaging?

- **Physiologic discharge:** Imaging is **not needed** if both the history and physical exam suggest a benign cause and your mammograms are up to date. Talk with your doctor about your nipple discharge to determine next steps.
- **Pathologic discharge:** Imaging is recommended and depends on your age and sex
 - **Women under 30:** Ultrasound is usually the first test.
 - **Women 30–39:** Either ultrasound or mammogram may be used first.
 - **Women 40 and older:** Mammogram plus ultrasound are usually performed.
 - **Men with nipple discharge:** Imaging is important since the chance of cancer is higher; a mammogram and ultrasound are usually recommended.
- If mammogram and ultrasound are normal but concerning discharge continues, evaluation by a breast surgeon and additional tests like **MRI** may be considered

➤ What should I do?

- Avoid frequent nipple squeezing, which can make discharge worse.
- Keep track of the **color, amount, and frequency** of the discharge.
- Report concerning features to your healthcare provider.
- Continue regular breast exams and mammograms as recommended.