

PATIENT HAND OUT



BREAST PAIN – WHEN IS IMAGING NECESSARY?

What is it?

Breast Pain is discomfort in the breast, also called **mastalgia** or **mastodynia**, and is very common, affecting up to **80%** of women during their lifetime. While it may seem worrisome, it is usually not a sign of breast cancer.

What can breast pain feel like?

Different pain sensations may make the breast feel tender, sore, heavy, burn, or itch.

What causes benign breast pain?

The cause of benign breast pain may be difficult to identify. **Hormonal changes** are the **most frequent** cause including those related to menstruation, perimenopause, pregnancy, and lactation. Other causes of breast pain include diet, medications, injury, surgery and infection.

When is imaging needed?

Imaging is needed when breast pain is focal and non-cyclical. Focal pain is felt in one location that you can point to with one finger. Non-cyclical pain is constant and does not come and go, or vary with your menstrual period.

Imaging is also needed when breast pain is associated with other symptoms such as a lump, skin or nipple changes.

When is imaging NOT needed?

Imaging is not needed when breast pain is non-focal and/or cyclical. Non-focal pain is felt in a large portion of the breast (more than one-quarter), may move throughout the breast, or be felt in both breasts. Cyclical pain is often associated with your menstrual period.

Research has shown that there is **NO** increase in breast cancer risk associated with non-focal or cyclical breast pain.

Should I get imaging just in case?

No. Additional imaging for breast pain does not increase the detection of cancer.

Annual **screening mammography** is always recommended. The American College of Radiology recommends screening mammography **EVERY YEAR** for all women **starting at the age of 40**. For women at elevated risk for developing breast cancer, imaging starting at an earlier age and/or supplementing yearly mammography with annual breast MRI may be recommended. Please speak with a physician about a formal risk assessment for breast cancer development if you are unsure.

Can I prevent or treat breast pain over the counter?

Certain lifestyle and dietary changes may help reduce breast pain, however there are limited supportive data. Wearing a bra that is the correct size with appropriate support for your breasts and routine exercise may help.

Some medications may also be helpful. Speak to your physician about over-the-counter medications for management of breast pain.

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