

# Breast Pain

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Breast pain, or mastalgia, is extremely normal in the United States. The most common type of breast pain is *cyclic mastalgia*, where both breasts become tender or painful, and possibly swollen or lumpy, before your menstrual cycle. These symptoms tend to improve after your menstrual cycle has ended.

Cyclic mastalgia is most common between ages 35-45, but can occur as early as the 20's and can also occur in women after menopause, especially if they are taking hormone replacement therapy. It is important to note that pain is only very rarely associated with cancer. However, all women with new breast pain should be seen by their doctor for an examination and a mammogram. Any new breast mass should be evaluated.

## **Dietary Changes**

- Some women find if they eliminate caffeine from their diet it can help reduce breast tenderness. However, it may take 6 months or more for you to feel the difference in your breasts. Caffeine can be found in coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate as well as some over-the-counter drugs.
- Estrogen is linked to breast pain and eating a low-fat diet, especially low in saturated fats, can decrease estrogen levels and improve breast pain and lumpiness. Avoid meat and dairy products and eat more fish, tofu, and non-fat dairy.
- Take note of foods that may be associated with either the onset of breast pain, or worsening the pain, and try avoiding them.

## Lifestyle

- Exercise has been shown to decrease estrogen levels and improve breast tenderness.
- A well-fitting, supportive bra can often greatly relieve breast pain.
- Quitting smoking.
- Applying warm compresses to the breast may also be helpful.

## Nutritional Supplements

- Black current seed oil and borage oil contain concentrated forms of gamma-linoleic acid. This has been shown to help reduce breast pain. Both of these supplements can be found in health food stores.
- Dietary Flaxseed (1 muffin containing 25 mg) resulted in a significant reduction in breast pain compared to a placebo in one double-blind study. Dietary flaxseed is an excellent source of polyunsaturated fatty acids.
- Evening primrose oil has been shown in double-blind studies to reduce the symptoms of breast pain. Evening primrose oil contains polyunsaturated fatty acids, which may be important to breast health. Many doctors recommend taking 3 grams per day for at least 6 months. You can find evening primrose oil in most pharmacies.
- Several vitamins have been suggested as helpful in alleviating breast pain. Vitamin E (200-600IU/day) has been suggested to help, as has Vitamin B6. Although the studies have not been conclusive, a 3 month trial may be worthwhile to see if it helps. **Remember, high doses of either of these vitamins may have harmful effects. Discuss these supplements with your doctor.**

## Medications

- Over the counter pain relievers such as Ibuprofen and aspirin can often be helpful in relieving breast pain.
- Oral contraceptives can be helpful, although they tend to increase breast tenderness initially. It may take up to 3-6 months to see any positive changes.
- Tamoxifen is an anti-estrogen that is used to treat breast cancer and is effective in reducing breast tenderness. However, it has significant risks and side effects, and so is used only in the most severe of cases.
- Danazol and Bromocriptine have been used in the past, however in most cases the side effects are considerably worse than the symptoms, and they are rarely used today.

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