

Knowing Your Breasts and Common Breast Conditions

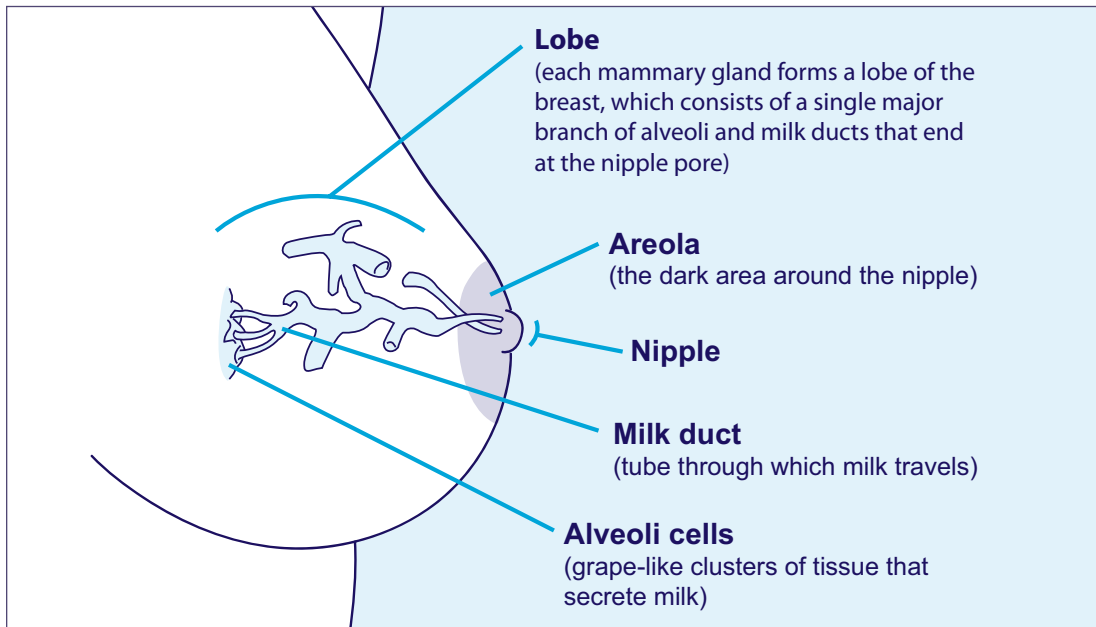
During a woman's life, she has different changes in her breasts. She might have more lumpiness during her period or may have breast problems, like mastitis, while breastfeeding. (Mastitis is explained later in this chapter.) Several breast conditions can

affect women. Learning more about these breast conditions can help you find problems early and have them treated right away.

Conditions in the Breast

General breast lumpiness (fibrocystic changes). This lumpiness happens around the nipple and areola and in the upper-outer part of the breast. Your breast may feel rubbery, firm, or hard to the touch. Changes or infection could cause your breasts to feel painful or full and lumpy. Some women can feel these lumps before and during their periods. The lumps usually go away by the end of their periods. During pregnancy, the milk-producing glands become swollen, and

Anatomy of the Breast



the breasts may feel lumpier than usual. Your breasts also can feel very painful or feel lumpy when you're breastfeeding. You may feel lumpiness in your breasts more as you approach middle age, and the milk-producing tissue of your breasts turns into soft, fatty tissue. Unless you are taking hormone therapy, this type of lumpiness generally goes away after menopause.

Cyst or "fluid-filled lump." A cyst is a sac or capsule in your breast that is filled with fluid. It can get larger right before your period. If it gets large enough, it feels like a lump, moves around when you touch it, and may be painful. Cysts may go away on their own, or your doctor can drain the fluid. They are usually not cancer.

Fibroadenoma. These breast tumors are not cancerous. They are round masses that can be small or large. You may feel them as a moveable, painless, firm, or rubbery lump. They may get bigger during pregnancy and smaller after menopause. Sometimes, they stop growing or shrink on their own. They can also be removed by surgery.

Intraductal papilloma. These growths usually occur in the milk ducts near the nipple. The growths cause bleeding from the nipple. They may also cause pain and breast enlargement. Sometimes, you can feel the lump. It is treated by taking out the growth and the part of the duct where it has grown.

Mastitis. This breast infection causes soreness or a lump in the breast. It can happen when you are breastfeeding or if you get a



Ask your doctor or nurse to explain any changes in your breasts.

crack in the skin around the nipple. It causes a fever and flu-like symptoms, such as feeling run down or very achy. Some women also have nausea and vomiting. It can cause yellowish discharge from the nipple. Your breasts may feel warm or hot to the touch. You also can have redness and swelling on the skin of your breast over the area that is infected. It usually occurs only in one breast. Mastitis is treated with self-care (such as applying warm compresses, getting plenty of rest and fluids) and antibiotics.

Duct ectasia. This condition happens to women nearing menopause. The ducts under the nipple become inflamed and clogged. Symptoms are a thick, green or black, sticky

discharge; pain; or a hard lump. This problem can go away on its own, or you may be treated with warm compresses, antibiotics, or surgery.

Abscess. Severe infections in the breast, like mastitis, can lead to an abscess. An abscess is a build-up of pus. The breast may be tender and swollen in that area. The abscess can be drained and treated with antibiotics.

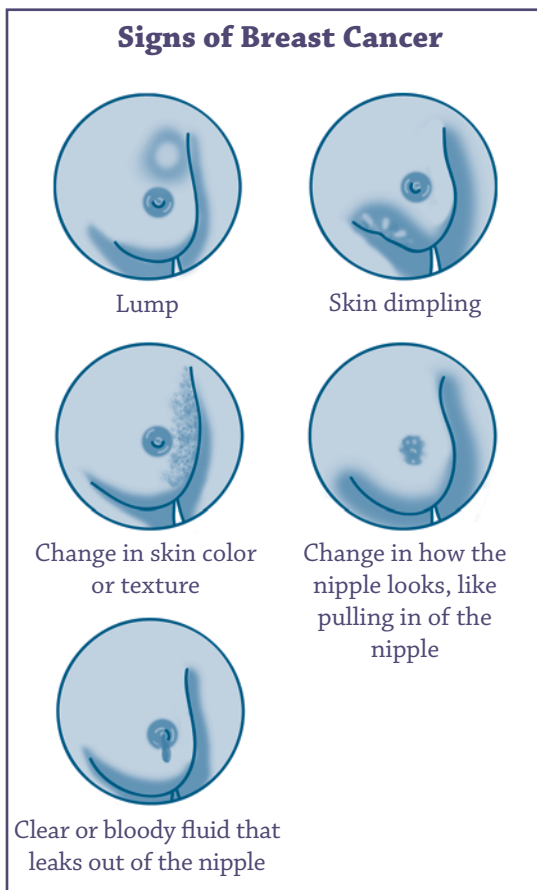
Fat necrosis. When the breast is hurt from an injury, scar tissue can form and cause a lump. The lump may or may not be painful, depending on how long ago you were injured. The skin may be red, bruised, or look dimpled. The lump may go away on its own or may be removed by surgery.

Breast Cancer

Many women are affected by breast cancer at some point in their lives, whether you've had it or had a family member or friend who's battled it. Other than skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women. It is also the disease that many women fear the most. But we need to remember that if breast cancer is found early, it can often be treated successfully. Many women have overcome breast cancer and are living their lives cancer free!

Early breast cancer is usually not painful. However, when the cancer grows, it can cause changes in your breasts. Look for them:

- ◆ a hard lump, thickening, or hard knot in or near the breast or in your underarm
- ◆ a change in the size or shape of the breast
- ◆ nipple discharge, clear or especially if bloody or blood-tinged that leaks out on its own without the nipple being squeezed
- ◆ dimpling or puckering of the skin on the breast
- ◆ itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple



- ◆ ridges or pitting of the breast (when your skin looks like the peel of an orange)
- ◆ unusual swelling, warmth, or redness that doesn't go away

Different Ways to Find Breast Changes

- ◆ **Get a mammogram.** It is the best way to find out if you have breast cancer. A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast. It can find breast cancer that is too small for you or your doctor to feel. **All women starting at age 40 should get a mammogram every one to two years.** Discuss how often you need a mammogram with your doctor. If your mother or sister had breast cancer, be especially proactive about getting a mammogram.
- ◆ **Have the mammogram done right after your period because it might be less painful.** It will also be more accurate at that time than when you have your period. If you change mammography facilities or need a second opinion, be sure to get your original mammograms—not copies. Your doctor will need to compare past mammograms with current ones to see if there are any changes.
- **Get a clinical breast exam.** This breast exam is done by your doctor or nurse. He or she will check your breasts and underarms for any lumps, nipple discharge, or other changes. The breast exam should be part of a routine checkup.

A breast self-exam and a clinical breast exam are not substitutes for mammograms.

- ◆ **Get to know your breasts.** Some women check their own breasts for changes. If you find a change, it's important to call your doctor or nurse for an appointment to see him or her. Make sure to watch the change you have found until you see your doctor or nurse.

Treatment Options

Different types of treatment are available for patients who have breast cancer. New types of treatments are also being tested in clinical trials, which are research studies. Some treatments may not be appropriate for all patients, however. Talk to your doctor about what may work best for you. Visit the web site of the National Women's Health Information Center at www.womenshealth.gov to find information on breast cancer and links to reliable resources, or call us at 1-800-994-9662 or TDD 1-888-220-5440.

Then and Now

Detecting breast cancer has come a long way. Mammography was invented in 1969. Since then, this technology has advanced. Mammography is now the best way to detect breast cancer.