

Breast cysts

Breast cysts are quite common and are caused by normal changes due to aging. Most women who experience cysts are between 35 and 50 years old, but anyone can get them. Cysts are simply fluid-filled sacs and usually go away on their own. It's also common to have more than one at a time. Almost all breast cysts are noncancerous.

How are cysts diagnosed?

Cysts are often seen as a mass on mammograms. If this occurs, you'll likely have an ultrasound, which can diagnose cysts accurately more than 95% of the time. Cysts vary in size. You likely won't even know you have one if it is microscopic. If it's larger, sometimes as big as a ping-pong ball, it can feel like a lump.

Are they treatable?

Typically, cysts go away over time. If they are painful or a cause for concern, your doctor may recommend extracting the fluid from the cyst, which is called aspiration. This procedure helps confirm it is a cyst, and the fluid removal often causes the lump to disappear.

When a cyst is discovered by ultrasound, aspiration generally isn't needed unless the cyst has some unusual features, is causing discomfort or appears to contain material other than fluid.

What is an aspiration like?

- The cyst is located by ultrasound.
- The skin is cleaned with an antibacterial solution.
- A small needle is inserted into the cyst, and the fluid is drained until the cyst disappears.
- The needle is removed, and a small bandage is applied.

If the aspirated material is not fluid, the radiologist may recommend additional tissue sampling (biopsy) of the area of concern. The material will be sent to a lab for testing.

How do I monitor my breast cysts?

Breast cysts often change in size, or they may entirely disappear between annual exams. Since your mammogram may look different each year when you have cysts, you may also have an ultrasound to monitor them. Your doctor may also recommend a diagnostic mammogram instead of a screening mammogram.



Is there a risk for cancer with breast cysts?

Only 1 in 1,000 cysts contain a tumor, and even still, not all of these tumors are cancerous. Most women with cysts are not at a greater risk for breast cancer. However, your risk may be minimally elevated if there is a family history of breast cancer involving your mother, sister or daughter.

Are cysts the same thing as fibrocystic breasts?

No. Fibrocystic breast condition is a common benign condition (not a disease) and is usually not related to breast cysts. Half of all women have a fibrocystic condition, which causes irregular-feeling breast tissue, cyclical pain and tenderness. These symptoms result from cyclical changes in normal female hormones.



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