

Breast cysts

This leaflet tells you about breast cysts. It explains what cysts are, how they're found and what will happen if they need to be treated.

Although much more common in women, men can also get breast cysts.



Benign breast conditions information
provided by Breast Cancer Care



Breast Cancer Care doesn't just support people when they've been diagnosed with breast cancer

We also highlight the importance of early detection and provide up-to-date, expert information on breast conditions and breast health.

If you have a question about breast health or breast cancer you can call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit **breastcancercare.org.uk**

We hope you found this information useful. If you'd like to help ensure we're there for other people when they need us visit **breastcancercare.org.uk/donate**

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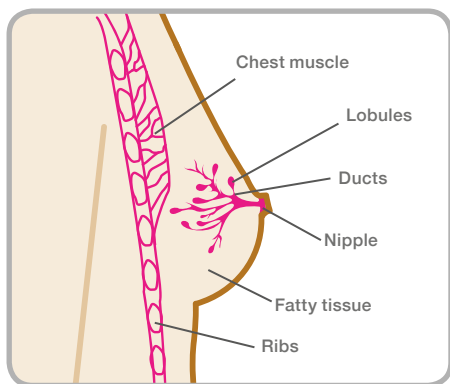
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What are breast cysts?



Breast cysts are a benign (not cancer) condition. They're one of the most common causes of a breast lump, and can develop in either one or both breasts. It's thought they develop naturally as the breast alters with age, due to normal changes in hormone levels. It's common to have more than one cyst.

Breasts are made up of lobules (milk-producing glands) and ducts (tubes that carry milk to the nipple). The milk glands are surrounded by fibrous support tissue and fat, known as breast tissue. This tissue gives breasts their size and shape. Sometimes, the milk glands can fill up with fluid; these are breast cysts.

Cysts may appear naturally as the breast alters with age, due to normal changes in the oestrogen hormone levels. During the menstrual cycle oestrogen causes fluid to be produced. Although you can develop breast cysts at any age, they're most common in women over 35.

After the menopause, as oestrogen levels fall, cysts usually stop forming. Women who use hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may still develop cysts.

Breast cysts can feel soft or hard and can be any size, ranging from a few millimetres to several centimetres. They're typically oval or round in shape and can develop quickly anywhere in the breast. For some people, cysts can feel uncomfortable and even painful. Before a period, cysts may become larger and feel sore and tender as hormone levels change. However, many women can have cysts and not be able to feel them at all.

How are cysts found?

Cysts usually become noticeable as a lump in the breast or are found by chance during a routine screening mammogram (breast x-ray) or while having investigations at a breast clinic for another reason.

If you see your GP because you have found a breast lump, they will sometimes be able to say whether it feels like a cyst. However, they're still likely to refer you to a breast clinic where you'll be seen by specialist doctors or nurses and have further tests.

At the breast clinic you'll have a breast examination. You may also have a mammogram or an ultrasound scan (using sound waves to produce an image of the breast). Ultrasounds can help to determine if a lump is solid or fluid-filled, such as a benign cyst.

If you're under 40, you're more likely to have an ultrasound than a mammogram. Younger women's breast tissue can be dense, which can make the x-ray image less clear so normal changes or benign conditions can be harder to identify. However, for some women under 40 mammograms may still be needed to complete the assessment.

If the lump can be easily felt, your specialist may put a fine needle into it and draw off the fluid to confirm that it's a fluid-filled cyst.

You can read more about these tests in our booklet **Your breast clinic appointment** or call our free Helpline on **0808 800 6000** for more information.

Treatment and follow-up

If you do have a breast cyst, you will not usually need any treatment or follow-up. Most cysts go away by themselves and are nothing to worry about.

If the cyst is large or causing discomfort, your specialist may draw off the fluid using a fine needle and syringe. Sometimes this is done using ultrasound to help find the cyst. The fluid drawn off from the cyst can vary in colour and range from clear to very dark. It will be sent to a laboratory for testing if the fluid is blood-stained.

Once the fluid has been drawn off, the cyst usually disappears. You might feel some discomfort as the fluid is being drawn off, and the area may feel bruised and tender for some days afterwards. If so, taking pain relief like paracetamol should help.

Breast cysts can come back or you may develop new cysts. The treatment for cysts is usually the same each time. You should also see your GP if you think your cyst has returned or you think you have developed a new one.

Can cysts be prevented?

Cysts happen in response to normal female hormones and there's no known way to prevent them. HRT can increase the risk of developing new cysts.

Does having breast cysts increase my risk of breast cancer?

You may feel anxious about having a breast cyst. Even though you may be relieved that it's a benign condition, you may still worry about breast cancer.

Having a breast cyst does not increase your risk of developing breast cancer in the future. However, it's still important to be breast aware and go back to your GP if you notice any changes in your breasts, regardless of how soon these occur after your cyst was diagnosed.

You can find out more about being breast aware in our booklet **Know your breasts: a guide to breast awareness and screening**.

About this leaflet

Breast cysts was written by Breast Cancer Care's clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast problems.



For a full list of the sources we used to research it:

Phone **0345 092 0808**

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