

What are benign breast conditions?

The term benign breast conditions (also known as benign breast diseases) describes many noncancerous changes that can affect the breast. Your health care provider may also use the term “fibrocystic change” to describe a range of benign breast conditions.

Some conditions can cause discomfort or pain and treatment may help. Others need no treatment. Some conditions mimic breast cancer and need tests to make a diagnosis.



Warning signs of breast cancer

See your health care provider if you notice any of these breast changes:

- Lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast or underarm area
- Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast
- Change in the size or shape of the breast
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin
- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
- Pulling in of the nipple or other parts of the breast
- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly
- New pain in one spot that does not go away

Breast lumps or lumpiness

Many women may find that their breasts feel lumpy. It is common for breast tissue to have a bumpy texture. For some women, the lumpiness is more obvious than for others. In most cases, there is no cause to worry.

Sometimes these changes are a normal part of the menstrual cycle. You may notice them before your period. If you are menopausal, you may notice them if you use menopausal hormones.

If the lumpiness can be felt throughout the breast and feels like your other breast, it is probably normal breast tissue. Lumps that feel harder or different from the rest of the breast (or the other breast) or that feel like a change are a concern. When this type of lump is found, it may be a sign of breast cancer or a benign breast condition.

If you find a new lump or thickening, don't panic. Have it checked by a health care provider. Even if you have had a benign lump in the past, don't assume a new lump will be the same. The lump may not be breast cancer, but it is best to make sure.

Can benign breast conditions increase the risk of breast cancer?

Although benign breast conditions are not breast cancer, some types increase the risk of breast cancer.

Benign breast conditions

Benign breast conditions differ from each other in how the cells look under a microscope. For example, hyperplasia cells look different from fibroadenoma cells. If you are diagnosed with a benign breast condition (or are told you have a fibrocystic change), find out which type you have.

Benign breast condition	Increases risk of breast cancer?	Other information
Hyperplasia (usual or atypical) — an overgrowth of cells, most often on the inside of the lobules or ducts in the breast	Yes	Women with atypical hyperplasia may consider options for lowering breast cancer risk.
Cyst — a fluid-filled sac that feels like a lump or a tender spot	No	More common in premenopausal women Often do not need to be removed (unless painful)
Fibroadenoma — a smooth, rubbery or hard lump that moves easily within the breast tissue	No	Most common in teenagers and younger women Often do not need to be removed (unless painful)
Intraductal papillomas — small growths that occur in the ducts of the breasts and can cause nipple discharge	No (unless they have abnormal cells or there is ductal carcinoma in situ in the surrounding tissue)	Occur most often among women ages 30 to 50 Removed with surgery
Sclerosing adenosis — small breast lumps caused by enlarged lobules that may be painful	Unclear	Does not need treatment
Radial scar (also called complex sclerosing lesions) — a core of connective tissue fibers	Unclear	Removed with surgery
Benign phyllodes tumor — similar to a fibroadenoma; a lump may be felt, but it is usually painless	No	Tend to occur in women ages 30 to 50 Removed with surgery
Diabetic mastopathy (lymphocytic mastitis, sclerosing lymphocytic lobulitis/ductitis) — small, hard lumps	No	Occurs most often in premenopausal women with insulin-dependent (type 1) diabetes Does not need treatment

Resources

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American Cancer Society
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Related fact sheets in this series:

- Biopsy
- Breast Cancer Detection
- Breast Imaging Methods
- Mammography
- When You Discover a Lump or Change

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