



Beaumont Hospital

Patient Information
on

Breast Cysts

What are breast cysts?

The breasts are made up of lobules (milk-producing glands) and ducts (tubes that carry milk to the nipple), surrounded by fatty and supportive tissue. Sometimes fluid-filled sacs develop in the breast tissue. These are breast cysts. It's thought that they develop naturally as the breast ages and changes.

Although you can develop breast cysts at any age, they are most common in women over 35 who haven't yet reached menopause. They occur more frequently as women approach the menopause and usually resolve or are less frequent after it. However, they may persist or develop in women who take hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after menopause.

Cysts can feel soft if they are near the surface of the skin, or like a hard lump if they're deeper in the breast tissue. They can develop anywhere in the breast, but are more commonly found in the upper half. For some women cysts can feel uncomfortable or even painful. Before a period cysts may become larger, and feel sore and tender.

It's common to develop one or more cysts either in one breast or both breasts –and this is nothing to worry about. It is also common to have many cysts without knowing about them.

How are they found?

Cysts usually become noticeable as a lump in the breast, or are sometimes found by chance when you have a breast examination or routine mammography.

When you have a breast examination your GP will sometimes be able to say whether the lump feels like a cyst. But to make sure s/he may refer you to a symptomatic breast clinic where you will be seen by specialist doctors and nurses.

At the breast clinic you'll probably have a breast examination and you may be referred for breast imaging (mammogram or breast ultrasound scan).

Treatment and follow up

If you do have a breast cyst you won't usually need any further treatment or follow up. Many cysts go away by themselves and are nothing to worry about.

If the cyst is large and is causing discomfort, or doesn't go away on its own, the breast specialist may drain the fluid from the cyst using a fine needle and syringe. The fluid drawn off from the cyst can vary in appearance, from clear to very dark. Once the fluid has been drawn off the cyst usually disappears. You may feel some discomfort as the fluid is being drawn off, and the area may be bruised and tender for some days afterwards. You may wish to take some painkillers such as paracetamol.

Cysts can refill, or you may develop new cysts. If you think a cyst has refilled or a new cyst has formed you should get your GP to check it. The treatment for cysts is the same each time.

What this means for you

Having a breast cyst does not increase your risk of developing breast cancer. However, it's still important to be breast aware and go back to your GP if you think your cyst has come back or if you notice any other changes in the breast.

Breast Awareness

Women of **all** ages should be breast aware.

Remember the **5** point breast awareness code

1. Know what is normal for you
2. Know what changes to look for
3. Look and feel
4. Discuss changes with your GP without delay
5. Attend for routine breast screening from aged 50 to 69

If you are aged between 50 and 69 you are eligible for Breast Check, the National Breast Screening Programme. If this is the case you should be on their register and an invitation will be sent in the post every 2 years with an appointment. If you are unsure if you are on the register or not, you can call Breast Check on 1800 45 45 55 or check on-line at www.breastcheck.ie.

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Author(s): Breast Care Team

Approved by: Breast Care Team