

## Comprehensive Breast Care Program

Phone: 780-638-2227 (CBCP)  
Fax: 780-643-4488  
Email: [cb.cp@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:cb.cp@albertahealthservices.ca)



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## Mastalgia (Breast Pain)

Breast pain is one of the most common breast problems and affects up to 70% of women at some time in their life. Approximately 15% of women may experience severe pain.

In general, breast pain is not a sign of cancer. Only rarely does breast cancer cause pain.

There are three types of breast pain:

### Cyclical Breast Pain

- Occurs only in pre-menopausal women and is associated with the menstrual cycle.
- Seems to be related to hormone variations and women usually feel increased pain before a period and a reduction of pain after a period.

### Non-Cyclical Breast Pain

- Is not related to the menstrual cycle. Pain can be felt in one specific area in the breast (referred to as “target-zone” breast pain) or it may be found in both breasts. The woman experiencing non-cyclical breast pain can point to exactly where it hurts. Doctors do not know what causes this type of continuous pain. Non-Cyclical breast pain may last 1 to 2 years and then disappear.

- Occurs in both pre- and post-menopausal women, is most common in women of 40-50 years.
- Hormone replacement therapy can produce non-cyclical breast pain.

### Non-Breast Origin Pain

- Is not actually a form of breast pain, but may feel like it comes from the breast.
- Is found in the muscles and bones of the chest and does not change with the menstrual cycle.
- “Costochondritis” is the medical term for arthritic pain that occurs where the ribs and breastbone connect. The aging process can contribute to increased stress on these joints.
- This may be associated with a history of trauma or previous surgery at the site but should be assessed to rule out disease.

### Evaluation of Breast Pain

Individual assessment includes a family and breast health history, physical examination, and if needed, ultrasound or mammogram (if over 35 years). It is important to identify the place, strength and duration of the breast pain and how much the pain interferes with a woman’s daily activities.

### Treatment of Breast Pain

- It is reassuring to know that symptoms are not due to cancer.
- Wear a well-fitted supportive bra
- Some women find it helpful to:
  - ♦ Eliminate caffeine: coffee, tea, cola drinks and chocolate.
  - ♦ Eat a low fat diet: Reduce meat and dairy intake. Increase grains, fruit and vegetables.
  - ♦ Reduce salt intake.
  - ♦ Vitamin E, Evening Primrose Oil, Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine).
- Some women may require an adjustment of hormone replacement therapy or oral contraceptives.
- Fluid-filled cysts (if large enough) can be drained to relieve pain. These cysts sometimes refill.
- Medication
  - ♦ A rare case of disabling breast pain may require medication. Your doctor may prescribe aspirin and/or anti-inflammatory agents to help relieve costochondritis. As well, local application of heat may be helpful. Severe cases may require medications that have unwanted side effects.

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