Breast Cyst

A breast cyst is a sac in your breast that is filled with fluid. This is common in women. Women can have one or many cysts. When the breasts contain many cysts, it is usually due to a noncancerous (*benign*) condition called fibrocystic change. These lumps form under the influence of female hormones (estrogen and progesterone). The lumps are most often located in the upper, outer portion of the breast. They are often more swollen, painful and tender before your period starts. They usually disappear after menopause, unless you are on hormone therapy.

Different types of cysts:

- **Macrocysts.** These are cysts that are about 2 inches in diameter.
- **Microcysts.** These are tiny cysts that you cannot feel, but that are seen with a mammogram or an ultrasound.
- **Galactocele.** This is a cyst containing milk, which develops when and if you suddenly stop breast-feeding.
- **Sebaceous cyst** of the skin (not in the breast tissue itself). These are not cancerous.

Breast cysts do not increase your chance of getting breast cancer. However, they must be followed and treated closely, because a cyst can be cancerous. Be sure to see your caregiver for follow up care as recommended.

CAUSES

- It is not completely known what causes a breast cyst.
- Estrogen may influence the development of a breast cyst.
- An overgrowth of milk glands and connective tissue in the breast can block the milk glands, causing them to fill with fluid.
- Scar tissue in the breast from previous surgery may block the glands, causing a cyst.

SYMPTOMS

- Feeling a smooth, round, soft lump (like a grape) in the breast that is easily moveable.
- Breast discomfort or pain, especially in the area of the cyst.
- Increase in size of the lump before your menstrual period, and decrease in size after your menstrual period.

DIAGNOSIS

- The cyst can be felt during an exam by your caregiver.
- Mammogram (*breast X-ray*).
- Ultrasound.
- Removing fluid from the cyst with a needle (*fine needle aspiration*).

TREATMENT

- Your caregiver may feel there is no reason for treatment. He/she may watch to see if it goes away on its own.
- Hormone treatment.
- Needle aspiration. There is a 40% chance of the cyst recurring after aspiration.
- Surgery to remove the whole cyst.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Get a yearly exam by your caregiver, including a breast exam.
- Do monthly self breast exams 5 to 7 days after your menstrual period.
- Get mammogram tests as directed by your caregiver.
- Only take over-the-counter pain medication as directed by your caregiver.
- Wear a good support bra, especially when exercising.
- Avoid caffeine.
- Reduce your salt intake, especially before your menstrual period. Too much salt can cause fluid retention, breast swelling, and discomfort.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You feel, or think you feel, a lump in your breast.
- You notice that both breasts look different than usual.
- You notice that both breasts feel different than before.
- Your breast is still causing pain, after your menstrual period is over.
- You need medicine for breast pain and swelling that occurs with your menstrual period.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop severe pain, tenderness, redness, or heat in your breast.
- You develop nipple discharge or bleeding.
- The breast lump becomes hard and painful.
- You find new lumps or bumps that were not there before.
- You feel lumps in your armpit (*axilla*).
- You notice dimpling or wrinkling of the breast or nipple.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.

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