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Breast Tenderness During the Menopausal Transition: What Helps?

Just as hormone fluctuations during menstruation and pregnancy can cause breast tenderness, so too can altering levels of hormones during the menopausal transition result in breast pain.¹ While postmenopausal women can experience breast pain, it is most common in premenopausal and perimenopausal women.²

Menopause is marked by the point in which a woman hasn't had a period for 12 consecutive months.³ Perimenopause, and therefore symptoms associated with it, including breast soreness, can begin as early as 10 years prior to that point.³

What causes sore breasts?

- **Hormone Fluctuations**

Upon entering perimenopause, a woman's estrogen and progesterone levels rise and fall unpredictably before they start to taper off;⁴ changes in hormone levels can result in sore or painful breasts.²

While hormone changes are a common cause of breast pain,⁵ other factors may be responsible, including:

- Certain medicines including oral contraceptives, antidepressants, blood pressure medications, antibiotics, and Hormone Replacement Therapy^{2, 5}
- Mastitis (inflammation of breast tissue)⁶ and breast infection⁵
- Cysts or fibroadenoma (noncancerous lump) in the breast(s)⁵
- Wearing a poorly fitting bra⁷
- Weight gain or large breasts²
- Breast injury⁷
- Prior breast surgery²
- Excessive caffeine use⁸ and smoking⁵
- Stress⁸

If you have any concerns about your breast pain, or are experiencing any new or worsening symptoms, make an appointment with a healthcare provider.

Types of breast pain

Symptoms can vary, be consistent or intermittent, and may affect one or both breasts.^{2,5}

- **Cyclic breast pain** is related to changing hormone levels, including the menstrual cycle, making it the most common kind of breast pain in pre- and perimenopausal women.² The pain is often described as dull, heavy, or aching, and can be accompanied by swelling or fullness.²
- **Noncyclic breast pain** is not related to hormonal changes and is more common, therefore, in postmenopausal women.² Described as a tight, burning, stabbing, or aching sensation, this pain is usually localized and affects one breast, but may affect both.²
- **Extramammary breast pain** feels like it may start in the breast tissue but originates outside the breast area; pulling a muscle in the chest is an example of this.²

Make an appointment with your doctor if breast pain continues daily for more than a couple of weeks, occurs only in one specific area of your breast, gets worse, or interferes with daily activities.

Breast Pain Reduction Tips

- **Reduce salt intake**
A diet high in too much salt may cause water retention,⁹ which can cause swelling in the body,⁷ including the breasts. Drink extra water to help flush out excess fluids.⁷
- **Supplement your diet**
Flaxseed,¹⁰ evening primrose oil,¹¹ Vitamins E^{11,12} and B₆¹² have shown possible benefit in helping decrease breast pain severity; consider adding into your diet through food or supplements. As always, speak to a doctor first.
- **Get regular exercise¹³**
Make sure to wear a supportive bra for the type of exercise you are doing. Avoid strenuous workouts or prolonged lifting activities that can put pressure on, or damage, the chest area.²
- **Always wear a supportive and well-fit bra**
This is true even when you sleep at night and especially when you work out.^{2,5}

- **Apply warm compress or a heating pad⁵**
- **Stop smoking and cut back on caffeine⁵**
- **Try OTC pain relievers**
If it is ok with your healthcare providers, OTC pain relievers such as aspirin, acetaminophen, and ibuprofen⁵ may bring some relief.

Breast pain due to hormonal fluctuations associated with the menopausal transition often goes away once menopause is reached;^{2,5} however, those who take Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) may continue to have sore breasts.^{2,5} If it doesn't improve with either time or any of the above-mentioned management strategies, talk to a doctor.

The contents of this article are for informational purposes only and not intended to provide medical advice, treat, diagnose, or replace the advice of a licensed medical professional. Please consult with your healthcare provider before making any treatment, dietary, exercise, or lifestyle changes to ensure that these changes are appropriate for you.

Sources

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