



Breast Concerns

Normal Breasts

Girls' breasts come in all shapes and sizes. Breasts are made up of fatty tissue and many milk-producing glands. Normal breasts can be lumpy and sore around the time of your period. Most girls have one breast smaller than the other (asymmetry).

Breast Lump

Most breast lumps are due to normal changes in the breast tissue that occur during puberty. Nearly all breast lumps are benign (noncancerous) in women under 21. Breast lumps are common and can be caused by the hormonal changes of your monthly menstrual cycle, a cyst, an infection or a benign tumor called a fibroadenoma. Lumps can be smaller than a pea or grow quite large. If you notice a new lump in your breast that does not disappear after your period, you should make an appointment to have a breast exam with your healthcare provider. A breast lump can be solid, soft, or fluid filled. Sometimes, an ultrasound is ordered to find out what kind of lump it is. Most of the time your lump will go away on its own or be examined regularly without any special treatment. A fibroadenoma is the most common solid breast non-cancerous lump found on ultrasound on young women. Rarely, large or rapidly growing lumps need to be removed by surgery.

Cysts

Cysts are small round or oval sacs filled with fluid and can be quite tender to touch. They may come and go with your period and are often most tender around your period. Your healthcare provider may order an ultrasound to make sure it is a cyst. In rare cases, when a cyst is very large or painful, your doctor may use a needle to remove the fluid inside of the cyst. These types of cysts are more common in older women.

Nipple discharge

Nipple discharge can be related to fibrocystic breast changes and often appears yellow to green. When the discharge is clear or milky it may be a sign of a hormone problem. Some medications can cause this as well. When the discharge is green, black or even bloody it may be caused by a narrowing or blockage of the duct. Usually, red discharge is a sign of injury, infection or noncancerous tumor. Your healthcare provider may examine the fluid under the microscope or order blood tests to get more information.

Fibrocystic changes

It is believed that 80% of women have some degree of fibrocystic changes in their breasts. Symptoms of fibrocystic breasts include tenderness, fibrous or rubbery tissue, thickening of tissue and sometimes a round, fluid-filled cyst. These changes are related to hormone fluctuations. Your healthcare provider doctor may recommend using a hormonal birth control to make your symptoms better.

Breast infections (Mastitis/Abscess)

When a breast is infected, it can be red, warm, swollen and painful. Some girls may have a fever. This is called mastitis and a deeper infection is called a breast abscess.

Breast infections are more common in women who are breastfeeding. Common causes of breast infections include hair removal, injury and piercings. Antibiotics are used to treat these infections. If there is an abscess or the antibiotics are not working, it may need to be drained by your healthcare provider. You can prevent infections by avoiding trauma and keeping your nipples clean and dry.

Nipple piercings can be dangerous because they have a high risk of infection. Girls with nipple piercings should be immunized against tetanus. Please contact your health care providers about risks of infections such as hepatitis and HIV. Infections due to piercings require prompt treatment with antibiotics and/or surgery. If you think you have a breast infection, see your healthcare provider right away.

Breast health tips

A well-fitting bra can help prevent back, shoulder and neck pain. Using sport bras and anti-chafing lubricant can help athletes who have soreness at their nipples from friction. It can be helpful to know how your breasts normally look and feel so you can tell if there are changes later on in life. Speak to your healthcare provider to get more information about breast exams.