

Breast Health at Menopause

Written by Editors, Red Hot Mamas

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Do you need to be concerned with your breast health during menopause? Absolutely! The breast is responsive to a complex interplay of hormones. From adolescence through menopause, as hormones change, so does breast tissue. As estrogen and progesterone levels fluctuate, it's not unusual for breasts to become sore or lumpy, and they sometimes form cysts. The tissue also changes because of the decreases in ovarian hormones, and breasts may shrink, there could be more fat growing in the breast, and they may begin to sag. Sure, many of these changes can be benign. But, since the chance of getting breast cancer increases with age and all women are at risk, we need to monitor our breast changes closely.

It's important to check your breasts at different times of the month, get to know your breasts, and give yourself a breast self examination. Many women experience painful breasts. There are many conditions that may cause this pain. Hormonal activity and fluid retention may make breasts tender or painful just before your period and/or during menopause. It is wise to have them checked by your doctor who may be able to suggest ways to manage the discomfort.

Common Benign Breast Changes at Menopause

With the rest of our body going through major changes during menopause, what makes you think your breasts aren't? During perimenopause and menopause, many women experience increased discomfort due to a change in hormone levels which effect breast tissue. Throughout postmenopause, the glandular tissue of the breast is largely replaced by fatty tissue.

Although many of these conditions are harmless, they should be checked by your doctor. Only a doctor can determine if lumpiness is benign. So if you feel any irregularities, you need to be examined by a health care provider.

Benign (noncancerous) breast lumpiness can occur with aging. The lumpiness usually occurs around the nipple and areola and/or in the upper-outer part of breasts. They may feel rubbery, firm or hard to the touch.

Lumpiness is common before and during menstruation and may become more prevalent as you approach middle-age (as the milk-producing tissue turns into soft, fatty tissue). Unless you are

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taking hormone therapy, this type of lumpiness generally goes away after menopause.

There is a difference between lumps and lumpiness. Lumpiness is simply normal breast tissue. If you are unsure whether you have a lump or lumpiness, always have it checked out by your doctor. Two kinds of lumps are cysts and fibroadenomas. Fibroadenomas typically occur when a woman is just starting to menstruate, and cysts occur typically when she's starting menopause.

One non malignant lump includes Fibroadenomas. These are small or large round masses that are usually painless. They are more common in women 15 to 30 years old and may get bigger during pregnancy and smaller after menopause. They may be moveable, firm or rubbery lumps. Fibroadenomas can sometimes stop growing or shrink on their own but they can easily be removed by surgery. Physicians usually recommend removal to ensure they are benign.

Cysts typically occur in women in ages 30 through early 50s. They are quite common as women approach menopause. It's absolutely important to have cysts checked out by your doctor. Many are harmless. However, sometimes cancers do appear. It's important to also remember that cysts don't increase the risk of cancer. Most research shows there is no relation between cysts and cancer. Every lump needs to be checked out to ensure it is not dangerous.

A common cause of non-cancerous lumps, thickening of the breast tissue and cysts is Benign Fibrocystic Disease. It's found more in women whose breasts are particularly sensitive to the monthly changes in hormone levels associated with menstruation. The problem usually disappears after menopause, although if you are taking hormone therapy the symptoms may continue. Cysts can be painful and are caused by fluid trapped in breast tissue. They should be checked by your health care provider who may be able to remove the fluid using a syringe with a fine needle. Sometimes they will need to be surgically removed.

Duct Ectasia is a condition that causes the ducts under the nipples to become inflamed and clogged. This affects as many as one in four women and is common as one nears menopause. Symptoms are thick, green or black sticky discharge or a hard lump. The problem can go away on its own or may be treated with warm compresses, antibiotics or surgery.

A Healthy Lifestyle Means Healthy Breasts

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Getting to know your breasts and promoting good breast health should be second nature to you at this point in your life. But if it's not, there is no better time to start than now. There are certain [lifestyle choices](#) you can make that will benefit your breasts and general health through menopause and beyond.

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