Breast Pain

Breast pain is very common in women and is usually not a sign of breast cancer (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/breast-cancer) . There are two different types of breast pain. Pain that is not suspicious is called “clinically insignificant pain.” Pain that might be a sign of breast cancer is called “clinically significant” pain.

Clinically insignificant breast pain is the most common type and is not a sign of breast cancer. This type of pain occurs in more than one part of the breast or in both breasts. The pain may come and go and may be worse before a woman has her menstrual period. Imaging tests are not recommended for this type of pain.

Clinically significant pain occurs in one part of the breast and does not come and go. Most clinically significant pain is not caused by cancer, but imaging tests are recommended.

For women under the age of 30 with clinically significant breast pain, breast ultrasound is usually appropriate as the initial imaging test. For women 30 years and older with clinically significant breast pain, diagnostic mammogram (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/mammo) , digital breast tomosynthesis (https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/tomosynthesis) (also known as 3-D mammogram), and breast ultrasound are usually appropriate as initial imaging tests.

If women have pain and other symptoms, such as a lump or nipple discharge, they should talk to their doctor because other imaging tests may be recommended.

— By Rebecca S. Koweek and Nina S. Vincoff, MD. This information originally appeared in the *Journal of the American College of Radiology*.

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