

Fibrocystic Breast Changes

What are fibrocystic breast changes?

You may have been told by your clinician that your symptoms are explained by fibrocystic changes. Fibrocystic breast changes are the combination of fluid filled sacs, or cysts, and prominent thickened fibrous tissue (similar to scars or ligaments in your body). These can be localised to one area of the breast or all over the breasts.

Fibrocystic breast changes used to be called fibrocystic disease, but it is not a disease; it affects women of reproductive age and is often part of cyclical hormonal changes. It is uncommon in post-menopausal women but can affect post-menopausal women on hormone replacement therapy.

It is benign, which means it isn't cancer. Be reassured that fibrocystic changes does not increase your risk of breast cancer.

What are the symptoms of fibrocystic breast changes?

- Nodularity (lumpiness) on one or both breasts
- Areas of thickened tissue/firm tissue
- Area of discrete lumps (cysts)
- Areas of tenderness
- Pain and tenderness may fluctuate according to the monthly cycle.
- Pain can range from mild to severe.

What causes fibrocystic changes?

The exact cause is unknown but experts suggest this could be as a result of monthly hormonal changes and hormonal fluctuation.

How is it diagnosed?

There are no special tests to diagnose fibrocystic changes as it is not a disease. If it is considered necessary you may get an ultrasound scan to help with the diagnosis. The doctor will sometimes do a needle test to confirm fibrocystic changes, although this is not done commonly. A needle test is when a fine needle is inserted in the breast to take some tissue sample and study it under the microscope.

This is not painful, but may feel uncomfortable.

What is the treatment?

In most cases no treatment is required, as symptoms tend to lessen over time. Fibrocystic changes which cause uncomfortable symptoms are managed like hormonal breast pain (ask your doctor for a pain leaflet).

Sometimes if cysts are causing problems for you, like pain, the doctor may drain larger cysts with a needle. If your symptoms persist with new lumps and pain, you may be referred to a breast care clinic.

Some simple measures you can consider to help you:

- Wearing a well fitted bra
- Healthy diet and healthy lifestyle (ask for a pain leaflet)
- Simple over the counter painkillers (like paracetamol/ibuprofen)
- Heat packs over the area.

If you are concerned about a new change or changes to your breasts, seek advice from your GP. They may refer you to a breast care clinic if appropriate.

Who can I contact for further information or support?

Macmillan Breast Care Nurse Specialists:

01273 696955 Ext. 4111 (answer phone).

Horsted Keynes Ward, Princess Royal Hospital:

01444 441881 Ext. 5686

If you have a problem outside of normal working hours (Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm) you should contact your GP 'out of hours' service.

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Ref number: 1086

Publication Date: October 2020 Review Date: October 2023



carer and patient information group approved