

Mastodynia Management (Breast Pain)

Breast pain is a very common entity, affecting up to 70% of women at some point in their lives. It occurs more frequently in younger, pre-menopausal women, although post-menopausal women can experience breast pain as well. Breast pain alone rarely signifies breast cancer.

Breast pain generally falls into 3 categories:

1. *Dietary*

Often women don't get enough Vitamin E or an essential fatty acid called linoleic acid. Therefore, we recommend:

- Vitamin E - 800 units per day
- Evening Primrose Oil - 3 grams per day in divided doses (found in health food stores)
- Decreasing or eliminating caffeine
- Flax seed

2. *Hormonal variations*

Women often have breast pain as their hormones begin to surge prior to their menstruated period. To control these hormonal swings can be difficult. Some women may be placed on low dose birth control pills if the pain is severe. Post-menopausal women on estrogen replacement therapy may need to lower their dose or stop it entirely if there pain is severe. In addition, a small amount of estrogen is made in the fatty tissues of everyone's body and reducing weight can often help decrease the amount of estrogen and breast pain. Very rarely, in cases of severe pain associated with excess hormones, Danazol (an anti-estrogen) can be considered to lower hormone levels. Many women start having breast pain in the 10-15 years prior to menopause, and this may represent pre-menopausal hormone fluctuations.

3. *Structural*

The breasts are held onto the chest wall by Cooper's Ligaments within the breast. Stretching of these ligaments can cause breast pain. Studies have shown that the majority of women have poor fitting bras. A firm, supportive & well-fitting bra is crucial to some women to relieve the pain that is related to stretching of the support structures of the breast. For patients with severe pain, an intercostal nerve block can provide relief, as can steroid injections. These would be performed by a pain management physician. Some patients need a mild prescription pain reliever such as Celebrex. However, for most women, Tylenol, Motrin or Advil will suffice.