

CCDHB Radiology Service – Mammography Wellington Hospital

What is Mastalgia?

Mastalgia is another word used for breast pain and is either **cyclic** (which means that it tends to change with your menstrual cycle and is often worse just before your period) or **non-cyclic**. Pain can range from minor discomfort to severe in some cases. Many women worry more about what is causing the pain than the pain itself.

What causes cyclic breast pain?

Cyclic breast pain is caused by a response to changing hormone levels. This leads to a sensation of heaviness, pain and an increase in tenderness. Cyclic breast pain becomes rare after menopause. Women who use hormone replacement therapy may still experience it.

How common is it?

Cyclic breast pain is very common.

Does it cause cancer?

Cyclic pain alone isn't usually a sign of breast cancer. You should see a doctor if the pain is troubling you or if you notice other changes, such as a breast lump or nipple discharge.

How is it treated?

Cyclic breast pain can be treated in a range of ways. Dietary changes are often suggested. In some cases hormones or hormone blockers are prescribed by a doctor. The following suggestions have helped some women:

- Wear a well-fitting, supportive bra

- Cut down on coffee, tea and caffeine (caffeine is in some over the counter medicines, such as cough medicine. Herbal tea and decaf coffee are ok. Reducing coffee should be done gradually as stopping suddenly can cause headaches)
- Cut down salt intake (as salt makes fluid retention worse)

You should discuss these treatments with a doctor.

What causes non-cyclic breast pain?

Non-cyclic breast pain without a lump can be due to breast cancer, but it is rare. More frequently it is due to a problem in areas near the breast, such as ribs or muscles in the chest wall, of occasionally organs in the chest (for example, heart or lungs). This can be caused by an injury or physical activity. Non-cyclic breast pain may be due to infection in the breast or, rarely, some inflammatory conditions. If you experience a new or unusual pain, see a doctor.

How common is it?

Non-cyclic breast pain is fairly uncommon.

Generally the pain is there all the time and does not vary with the menstrual cycle.

How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the cause - see a doctor to get this checked even if your mammogram is normal.