



GENERAL SURGERY  
PATIENT & FAMILY  
EDUCATION



# BREAST LUMPS: SHOULD YOU WORRY?

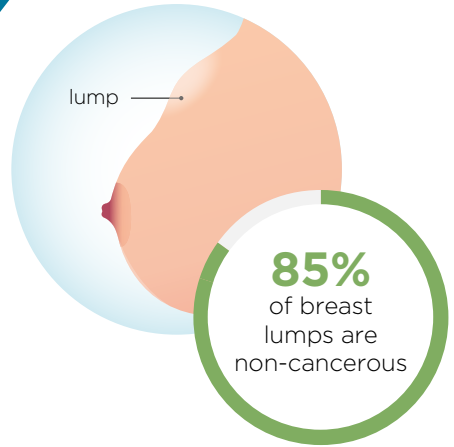
They may be non-cancerous, but they should not be ignored.

# WHAT ARE BREAST LUMPS?

Breast lumps are abnormal growths that develop in the breast. They are common, and if you find one during your breast self-examination, there is no need to panic.

**Most breast lumps are benign (non-cancerous), but it is best to get the lump checked to be sure.**

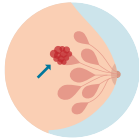
There are many reasons why you may find a lump in your breast. Some women have naturally lumpy breasts and may experience pre-menstruation lumpiness and pain. Hormonal changes and breastfeeding can also cause changes in the way breasts look and feel.



**While breast lumps are more common among women, men may also experience excessive breast tissue (gynaecomastia) caused by hormonal changes.**

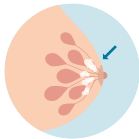
## Common causes and types of breast lumps

There are many different causes of breast lumps, and they may form in different parts of the breast.



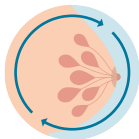
### Fibroadenomas

Usually found in women between the ages of 20 to 30, fibroadenomas develop in milk glands because of non-cancerous tissue overgrowth. If you are older, and notice larger lumps, your doctor may run tests to rule out non-cancerous growths such as phyllodes tumours.



### Cysts and fibrocystic changes

Breast cysts are fluid-filled lumps which are very common in women between the ages of 30 and 50. They happen when breast tissue starts to shrink and become more fibrous. This can make breasts feel lumpy and tender, or even cause nipple discharge. Milk glands may also turn into cysts, which can get infected. However, breast cysts are not a disease and do not significantly increase the risk of breast cancer.



### Cyclical lumpiness

Hormonal (progesterone levels) changes during the menstrual cycle can cause the breast to feel lumpy and tender even while breast tissues are normal. Lumpiness can usually be felt 7 days before and/or after menstruation.

## How are breast lumps diagnosed?

---

Your doctor will speak to you about your medical history and symptoms, and perform a thorough physical examination.

One or more of the following tests may be advised:



### Breast ultrasound

evaluates the breast lump(s) using sound waves



### Mammogram

evaluates the breasts for signs of cancer using X-rays



### Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)

produces detailed images of the breast using magnetic fields



### Biopsy

removes a portion of, or sometimes, the entire lump in the breast for evaluation

## What are the treatment options available?

---

**Non-cancerous lumps** often pose no risk and may not require treatment, though you may choose to have them removed if they are large or painful. Doctors may sometimes recommend the removal of non-cancerous growths such as phyllodes tumours, a rare form of breast tumour.

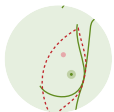
**Cancerous tumours** need to be removed and your doctor will recommend the most suitable option based on the type of breast cancer, its spread, and your overall health.

### Treatment options include:



#### Lumpectomy

removes the tumour and part of the breast



#### Mastectomy

removes the tumour and entire breast



#### Quadrantectomy

a partial mastectomy to remove the tumour and a quarter of the breast and surrounding muscle



#### Radiotherapy

use of radiation to kill cancer cells



#### Drug therapy

shrinks or starves the cancerous tumour. This includes chemotherapy, hormone therapy, and targeted drug therapy

Following the removal of the cancerous tumour, your doctor will discuss your options for breast reconstruction to restore the natural appearance of the breast.

---

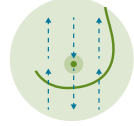
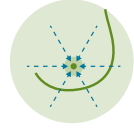
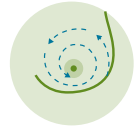
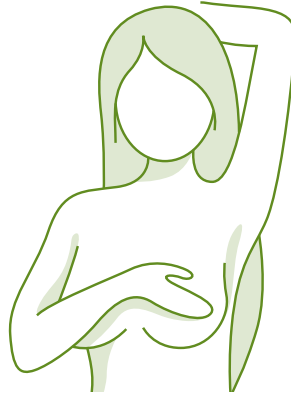
## How often should you get a breast examination?

Every woman should regularly perform a breast self-examination at home, and get screened regularly with mammograms.

### Self-examination



Monthly, 7-10 days after the start of menstruation, or at any day of the month for postmenopausal women.



### Steps for effective self-examination

#### Visual check

1. Stand in front of a mirror and look for visible changes in both breasts: change in shape, swelling, dimpling in the skin, changes in the size, shape or colour of the nipples.
2. Perform the above using three different positions.



Arms relaxed by the sides



Arms raised overhead



Hands on hips while flexing chest muscle

#### Manual check

A manual check can be performed while standing, or lying down, using these steps:

- Use the pads (not the tips) of your three middle fingers to check the entire breast and under the armpits for lumps, thickened tissue or other changes. Gently squeeze nipple to check for discharge.
- Systematically check each breast to be sure you have examined every part. Repeat the test using light, medium and firm pressure.
- Switch hands and repeat the process to check the other breast.

### Breast screening (mammogram)

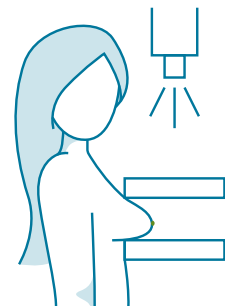
**1x**  
a year

Women aged between 40 and 50 years

**1x**  
every 2  
years

Women aged 50 and above

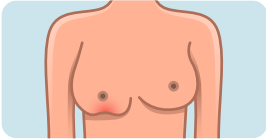
During a mammogram, the breast is compressed between two plates for an X-ray image to be taken.



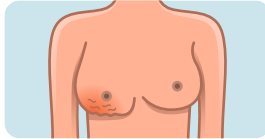
# WHEN SHOULD YOU SEE A DOCTOR?

There may not be any noticeable symptoms in the early stages of breast cancer. This is why regular self-checks are important to detect even minor changes. Any lump in the breast should be investigated to eliminate the possibility of breast cancer.

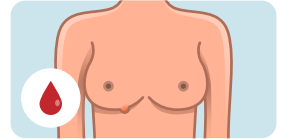
Warning signs of breast cancer include:



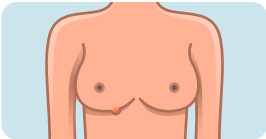
Change(s) in the size or shape of the breast



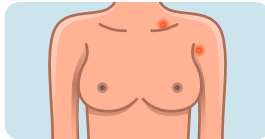
Dimpling, redness or scaling of the skin on the breast



Lumps that persist after menstruation



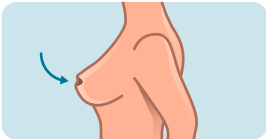
Lumps that are growing



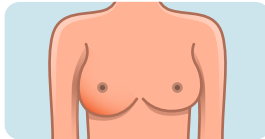
Lumps in the armpit



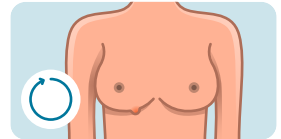
Nipple discharge



Pulling-in (inversion) of the nipple



Swelling in any part of the breast



Breast lump(s) that recur after treatment

**An accurate diagnosis will determine what treatment, if any, is needed. Treating breast cancer in its early stages can prevent disease progression and provide the best chance for successful recovery. For a peace of mind, don't delay seeking medical advice.**

**Speak to your doctor to discuss any concerns today.**

For more information, speak to us at:



Gleneagles Hospital Singapore, Mount Elizabeth Hospital, Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital and Parkway East Hospital are accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI).

