Breast pain can be distressing. Often there's no obvious cause and it goes away without treatment. But there are some treatments that can help.

What happens?

Breast pain is also called mastalgia. It's very common.

It's normal for your breasts to feel tender at certain times, such as just before your period and in early pregnancy. This is caused by normal changes in your hormones.

But you might want treatment if your breasts are so painful that this stops you enjoying life.

There are two main types of breast pain. **Cyclical breast pain** is very common. It's worst just before your period.

**Non-cyclical breast pain** isn't linked to your periods. Your breasts feel painful some of the time, or even constantly. Usually, there doesn't seem to be a cause.

Sometimes it can be caused by things like an infection. If that's the case, your doctor may give you antibiotics.

Many women worry that breast pain means they have breast cancer. But pain on its own is not a common symptom of breast cancer. Less than 1 in 10 women with breast cancer have pain as their main symptom. But if you are worried about breast pain, see your doctor.

Your doctor will examine your breasts to check for signs of cancer. The main signs are a lump, a sore that won't heal, or changes to the skin. If your doctor thinks it's necessary, you'll go to a specialist for further tests, within two weeks.

What are the symptoms?

Cyclical breast pain can be dull, heavy or aching. It starts in the two weeks before your period. The pain may get worse until your period starts and then get better. You may get pain in both breasts.

Non-cyclical breast pain can be sharp and burning. It may come and go, or be there all the time. You may get pain in just one breast.

See your doctor urgently if you have:

- Discharge from your nipples
- Signs of infection, like redness, pus or fever
- A new lump in one of your breasts.
What treatments work?

If your breast pain has no obvious cause, and it doesn't disrupt your life too much, you may not need treatment. Many different treatments have been tried for breast pain. But there hasn't been much good research on how well they work.

Things you can do for yourself

You may find it helps to have a bra properly fitted, or to try one with more support. A sports bra for exercise may help.

Painkilling gels or lotions

Doctors think that painkilling gels or lotions work well for breast pain and are safe. These gels include painkillers called nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). One type, called diclofenac, gets rid of breast pain for about half the women who try it. But these treatments can have side effects. Your skin may itch or go red and blister.

You can buy diclofenac gel or lotion (brand names Pennsaid, Voltarol Emulgel, Solaraze) from a chemist. You can also get other NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen (Fenbid and Ibugel), at the chemist. You shouldn't use these products if you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

Hormone treatments

If your breast pain is very bad, your doctor might suggest taking hormone medicines. They can reduce pain. But they often cause side effects, which you might find difficult to put up with. You need a prescription for these medicines.

Danazol might reduce breast pain. Possible side effects include putting on weight, getting a deep voice, heavy periods and muscle cramps. You may be able to avoid these side effects if you take a small dose for the two weeks before your period, rather than all the time. It comes as capsules and the brand name is Danol.

Gestrinone might reduce breast pain. Possible side effects include greasy skin, body hair, acne, bleeding between periods, voice changes, low sex drive, reduced breast size, headaches, depression and tiredness. It comes as capsules and the brand name is Dimetriose.

Goserelin may reduce the number of days a month that you get breast pain. Possible side effects include hot flushes, low sex drive, vaginal dryness, irritability, oily hair or skin, and reduced breast size. Goserelin (brand name Zoladex) is given as an injection. You'll usually be offered this treatment only if you get severe breast pain and other treatments haven't helped.

Diets and supplements

Many women prefer to try diets, vitamin pills or supplements. But there isn't much evidence to show whether they work.

Women who follow a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet may get less breast swelling and tenderness before their period.
Breast pain

There's not enough research to show if vitamin B-6 (also called pyridoxine) or vitamin E work for breast pain. Taking vitamin B-6 for a long time may be harmful.

Evening primrose oil does not help breast pain.

Other treatments

Many treatments have been tried for breast pain, including progesterone hormones, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), diuretics (water tablets) and antibiotics. But there's no evidence that any of them work.

What will happen to me?

Breast pain often goes away on its own without any treatment. But it tends to come and go, so it may come back again. It's hard to say what will happen to you as an individual.

Non-cyclical breast pain seems to go away on its own more often than breast pain linked to your periods. About 8 in 10 women with any type of breast pain decide not to have treatment.