

Fibroadenomas

What are they?

Fibroadenomas are very common, non-cancerous changes of normal breast tissue. They arise when one portion of normal glandular breast tissue undergoes a temporary, irregular growth pattern. They usually develop during the teen years and early twenties. Often they are not noticed until later in life when the breast tissue normally becomes less firm and more 'relaxed.' Fibroadenomas could be found in almost all breast tissue if it were examined closely enough.

What causes them?

The glandular breast tissue, which produces and secretes milk, goes through normal monthly changes in response to fluctuations in hormone levels. It is believed that one small portion of the glandular tissue, along with some fibrous connective tissue, may become overly sensitive to the body's estrogen and react with a temporary 'overgrowth.'

Fibroadenomas usually grow slowly for a few years, then seem to double in size within a period of a few months. At that point they tend to stop growing and stay the same or even shrink through the remainder of life. Fibroadenomas tend to be found more often in women who smoke or who are taking hormone replacement therapy after menopause. They may get larger and become more noticeable during pregnancy. They do not seem to be triggered by using birth control pills. They may be found more often in women who are taking Cyclosporin, an anti-rejection medication used after organ transplants.

Will they cause future problems?

Fibroadenomas are not cancer and they rarely turn into cancer. Neither do they increase the chances of developing breast cancer. If you find a dominant lump in your breast, it doesn't always mean that you have cancer. It is important, though, to have your healthcare provider evaluate any breast lump.

What do they look and/or feel like?

Fibroadenomas are usually found in the upper, outer portion of the breast tissue. There can be more than one fibroadenoma in a breast. They can be large or small. They feel rubbery, fairly firm, smooth, and are moveable. They may feel like grapes or marbles. In older women they tend to be smaller, harder, and not quite as moveable. They do not change significantly in size in response to monthly hormonal changes.

What can be done about them?

It is important to be cautious but not paranoid about any breast lump. If a new lump is found or an excision lump changes, it should be evaluated by your healthcare provider. Your provider will probably recommend that women of any age have an ultrasound exam of that breast. If you are 40 years of age or older, a mammogram may also be recommended. If the lump cannot be clearly defined as a fibroadenoma by these tests, it might be necessary to have a biopsy of that area in order to prove that the tissue in the lump is not a threat to your health. A fibroadenoma is seldom removed with surgery unless it is particularly bothersome.

What is the best way to maintain breast health?

- Perform monthly self breast exams. This should be done at the end of your menstrual cycle when breast tissue is least swollen or tender. The goal is to learn what your normal is. When 'normal' is known, 'abnormal' becomes easy to recognize.
- Report any bothersome or worrisome breast changes to your healthcare provider. He or she will carefully evaluate it then offer a treatment recommendation.
- Get a mammogram. One out of eight women in the U.S. will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. The best chance for survival and cure lies in early detection, when the cancer is the smallest. Mammography, a low dose X-ray, can detect cancers that are still too small to feel. According to the American College of Radiology, women are encouraged to start annual screening mammograms at age 40. Yearly mammograms will show any subtle changes the soonest.

If you have any questions, call:

308-630-2253 to speak to a Breast Health Center technologist

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