

FLUID-FILLED CYSTS

What is a fluid-filled cyst?

- A cyst is a tissue sac filled with fluid. They are most often moveable, round lumps and may be subject to rapid changes in size during the menstrual cycle.
- They can be tender and some can appear overnight.
- Having a cyst does not put a woman at risk for developing cancer.

Simple Cyst:

- Found deep or shallow in breast tissue.
- A cyst can vary in size.
- Cysts often get larger and feel tender just before a menstrual period.
- Cysts deep in the breast may feel more like a firm lump and bulge out the overlying tissue.

Small Multiple Cysts:

- Tiny cysts may be found in groups, like a bunch of grapes or scattered throughout the breast.
- In fibrocystic breasts cysts can occur in the breast ducts and the lobules.
- Cyst changes are often found in both breasts, producing a feeling of “lumpiness”.
- Often you can easily locate cysts, moving them freely under your fingers like a small blister in the breast tissue. They are smooth on the outside and “squishy” when pressed upon. If the cyst is full of fluid, however, it may be firm.
- Most often women between 35 and 55 years have these changes because of their hormone levels are relatively high or irregular. The exact cause of cysts is not yet known.

Diagnosis:

- Diagnosis can be made from a woman’s history, physical examination, ultrasound, mammography, (if over 35 years) and/or needle aspiration.
- A cyst diagnosed by ultrasound does not need to be drained.
- Draining, however, is available if a cyst is large and painful.

Needle Aspiration:

The doctor inserts a needle attached to a syringe into the fluid-filled sac and draws out the fluid, collapsing the cyst like a small punctured balloon. Cysts can fill back up after they have been drained.

What is the Treatment?

- Some Women find symptom relief with lifestyle changes such as eliminating caffeine, dietary fat reduction, regular exercise, and stress management.
- The primary goal of treatment is symptom improvement and relief of anxiety (by ruling out a breast cancer).
- Re-examination at regular intervals by both you and your physician is important, as cyst formation may occur at any time until the menopause.
- All new lumps must be assessed with imaging to assure they are fluid-filled cysts and not solid.

References:

1. Kneece, J. (2003). *Finding a lump in your breast. Where to go...what to do* (2nd ed.). Columbia: EduCare Inc.
2. Love, S. (2015). *Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book* (6th ed.). Boston: Da Capo Press
3. Olivotto, I., Gelmon, K., McCreadyD., Kuusk, U. (2017). *Intelligent Patient Guide to Breast Cancer* (6th ed.). Vancouver: Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication.
4. Mayo Foundation for Medical Educational Research (MFMER) 1998-2019 Fibrocystic Breasts: mayoclinic.org

This information is of a general nature and may vary according to your special circumstances. If you have specific questions, please contact your physician or appropriate health care professional.