

BREAST MASSES

Breast cysts – harmless sacs of fluid in the breast tissue – are fairly common and usually non-cancerous. Most often, cysts are found in women between 30 and 50, who are nearing menopause.

How do you know if what you are feeling during a self-examination is a cyst or an actual lump? While it is always best to get confirmation from your medical provider, one way to tell the difference is by how they feel. Think of a cyst as a water balloon under the skin. It should be flexible, and can move around. It may also change size during a menstrual cycle. A lump, on the other hand, will feel like a firm ball of tissue. Remember: The deeper the cyst or the lump, the more difficult it may be for you to distinguish by touch.

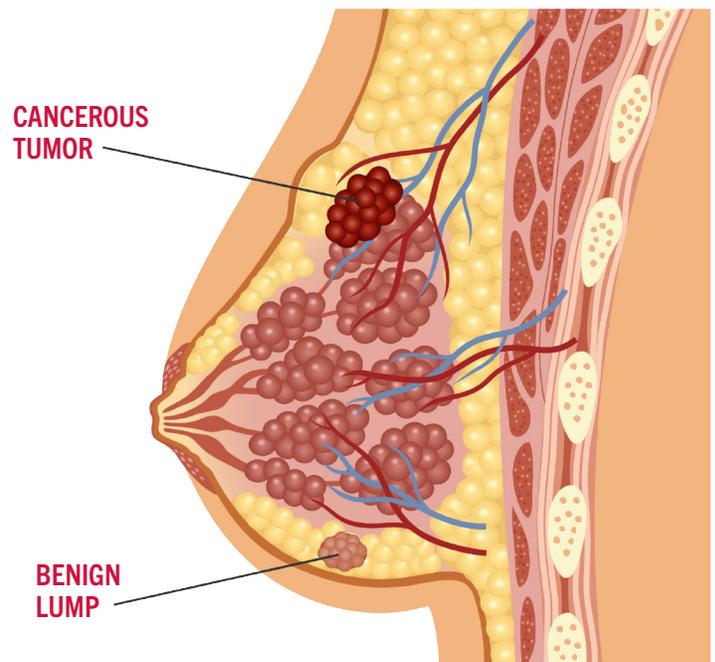
REASONS TO HAVE A FINE NEEDLE ASPIRATION BIOPSY

Your physician has a couple of options to help determine whether you have a cyst or some other type of mass. A cyst shows up easily on ultrasound, which is non-invasive. Another option is a fine needle aspiration biopsy with a syringe. This procedure removes the fluid from inside the cyst, which is examined under a microscope to determine whether the cyst is benign or cancerous. A fine needle aspiration biopsy allows your doctor to gather the most information about the cyst or lump, paving the way for a clear treatment plan. For cysts, that plan may involve draining the fluid and relieving the associated pressure.

BREAST PSEUDOLUMPS

A pseudolump can feel quite hard and may change size during a menstrual cycle. It may also not move. These benign lumps can often be the result of breast surgery or enhancement procedures, and may be hardened silicone, dead fat tissue, scar tissue, or a rib bone pressing into breast tissue and compressing it.

A pseudolump can usually be confirmed through a mammogram and ultrasound. However, there are times a needle biopsy may be required.



FIBROCYSTIC DISEASE

While this is not actually a disease, fibrocystic disease is at the root of 80% of all breast operations performed. Most often found in women aged 35 to 50, fibrocystic disease causes multiple cysts to form, and, possibly, increased fibrous tissue. Tenderness and lump size commonly increase during the week before menstruation and decrease a week after. It is believed fibrocystic disease is the result of the body's response to abnormal hormone levels.

BREAST FIBROADENOMAS

Detecting a breast fibroadenoma is easier than finding a cyst, because fibroadenomas are almost always close to the surface. This type of tumor, consisting of glandular and connective tissue, is benign and can feel either hard or firm. Usually, there is no need to treat a fibroadenoma. However, if necessary, they can be removed via a lumpectomy.

While fibroadenomas can be found in women of any age, they are most often detected in those younger than 30.