



# BREAST ABSCESS



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

An infected area of breast tissue that becomes filled with pus when the body fights the infection. It involves breast tissue, nipple(s), milk glands, and milk ducts. They almost always occur in a breast-feeding woman.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Breast pain.
- Breast is tender, red, or hard.
- Fever and chills.
- Feeling ill.
- Tenderness in the area under the arm.

### CAUSES

Bacteria that enter the breast through the nipple. This can happen if a nipple gets dry and cracked from breast-feeding.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Breast infection, such as mastitis.
- Pelvic infection after delivery of a baby.
- Previous breast abscess.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Rheumatoid arthritis.
- Use of steroid medications.
- Heavy cigarette smoking.
- Lumpectomy with radiation.
- Some breast implants.
- Smoking (risk factor for women that are not breast-feeding).

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Clean the nipples and breasts carefully, before and after nursing.
- Lubricate the nipples after nursing. Use vitamin A & D ointment or another topical drug if recommended.
- Avoid clothing that irritates the breasts.
- Don't allow a nursing infant to chew nipples.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Usually curable in 8 to 10 days with treatment. Draining the abscess is sometimes needed to speed healing.
- It is rarely required for a patient to stop breast-feeding, even with severe infection.

Certain antibiotics and pain relievers will require that breast-feeding be stopped for a short period of time. It will then be necessary to pump the breasts.

## **POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS**

An abnormal opening (fistula) may develop between the breast and the outside of the body.



## **DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT**

### **GENERAL MEASURES**

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam of the affected area. This is often all that is needed for diagnosis. Medical tests such as a culture of the pus and ultrasound may be done.
- The abscess may need to be drained. Draining the abscess may be done with a needle inserted into the abscess or with a small incision. This will reduce the pain and help clear up the infection.
- You may or may not be able to keep breast-feeding with the affected breast. Your health care provider will help determine if this is possible. If you can't breast-feed, use a breast pump to remove milk from the infected breast until you can start nursing again on that side.
- Use a warm, moist compress on the breast to relieve pain, hasten healing, and help the flow of milk.

### **MEDICATIONS**

Drugs for pain or antibiotics for infection may be prescribed.

### **ACTIVITY**

After treatment, resume normal activity as soon as symptoms improve.

### **DIET**

No special diet.



## **NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF**

- You or a family member has symptoms of a breast abscess.
- Any of the following occur during treatment:

Fever.

Pain becomes more severe.

Infection seems to be spreading, despite treatment.

Symptoms don't improve in 72 hours.

