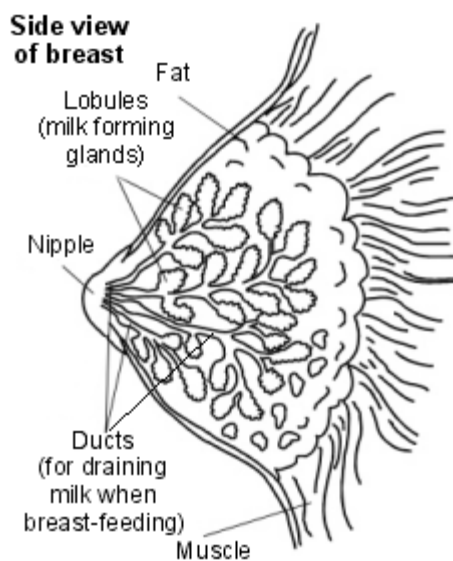


What are breast cysts?

A breast cyst is a fluid filled space occurring in the milk producing part of the breast tissue. The cyst is benign (non- cancerous). They are not caused by blockages to the milk ducts. The breast cyst can vary in size from 1-2mm to larger than a ping pong ball. You can have a single cyst or many cysts in the breast at a time.



Who gets breast cysts?

Breast cysts are common and can happen to women of any age. They are most common in the years leading up to the menopause (40-60 years old). When a woman is going through her menopause the hormone messages sent from her ovaries are not as accurate and this can contribute to breast cysts being formed.

Between the ages of 35 and 53 years, Up to 70 in every 100 women would have a breast cyst found on an ultrasound scan.

What are the symptoms of a breast cyst?

You may have had your breast cyst discovered on a routine screening mammogram. Most cysts are

small and do not have any symptoms. Some cysts cause a lump (especially if they are close to the skin or have filled very quickly).

If a cyst has filled quickly and is very tense it may be very tender. Especially if it is in an awkward place e.g. under a bra wire.

It is rare but breast cysts can become infected or have a bleed into them.

Diagnosis of breast cysts

An ultrasound scan of your breast usually gives the doctor enough information to diagnose a "simple cyst" or "complex cyst".

Simple breast cysts on ultrasound have an appearance of having a thin wall, are filled with fluid and have a change to the sound shadow behind the cyst. These simple cysts do not need any treatment. If the cyst is uncomfortable it can be drained of its fluid to make it more comfortable for you.

Complex cysts do not look like simple cysts on an ultrasound scan. The complex cysts will need to have a needle biopsy to help us make a diagnosis. There are several rare other fluid making processes in the breast tissue that may be diagnosed.

How can a cyst be treated?

If a cyst is causing symptoms or making you anxious it can be drained (aspirated) with a thin needle. The fluid is usually cloudy and green, light yellow to brown coloured. The most common colour is green. This fluid is normal and it is not necessary to send it to the laboratory for testing. Some doctors will send the fluid for testing.

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Most of the time draining the fluid causes the cyst to disappear. In some women the cyst can refill in the same location. Surgery is rarely useful.

What happens if nothing is done to the cyst?

The cysts tend to heal themselves over the coming weeks to years. Most disappear by the time of the menopause unless you are taking HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy). They do not turn into cancers.

What happens if I find a new lump and I have already had a breast cyst?

Every new breast lump needs to be checked and a diagnosis made. A previous breast cyst does not prevent cancer. Please see your GP as you would with any new breast lump. Most lumps will probably be further breast cysts.

Follow-up / Results

While we do not think that cysts are dangerous, they can obscure other areas of your breast. We will take this into account when we plan your follow up care.

If you do have any further questions or concerns please ask your doctor or the clinic nurse.

You may have a follow up appointment arranged at the hospital clinic or you may be discharged from the clinic. Your GP will be sent a copy of the results of any fluid aspirated from your cyst, and it should be available in 2-3 weeks after your cyst aspiration.

Contact us

Wellington Hospital

Main Outpatients Clinics, Level 2

Phone: (04) 8060 358 (Nurse's answerphone)

Hours: 8am-4.30pm, Monday to Friday

Kenepuru Hospital

Please phone the Wellington Hospital contact number above.