

## HealthCentral

### Why Do My Breasts Tingle?

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It might be an entirely new sensation that’s happening out of the blue, or one you associate with something else happening—like when you’re on your period, newly pregnant, breastfeeding, or a multitude of other reasons. Or maybe it’s not a female-related issue at all—because it’s happening to you, and you’re a man.

We’re talking about breast tingling. Called mastalgia, breast pain—or a tingling breast sensation—is one of the most common breast complaints for women ages 15 to 40 years old, according to the National Library of Medicine (NLM). In fact, about 70% women in the U.S. will experience this condition in their lifetime, but only about 30% will seek medical care to address it, the NLM reports.

Many women describe it as a pins and needle kind of feeling, or a burning or dull aching sensation, that can also be searing and painful at times, explains Anna Cabeca, D.O., an OBGYN and author of *The Hormone Fix* and *MenuPause*, based in Dallas, TX. It can happen in just one breast, or both. But there is some good news: Breast tingling is one of the “least associated symptoms of breast cancer,” according to the NLM, and breast pain of any sort is observed in only 0.5% to 2% of the people who are later diagnosed with cancer. (But if you’re experiencing a new or concerning symptom, it’s always good to get checked out by your doctor.)

To learn more about tingling in the breast, we went to Dr. Cabeca and other experts to see exactly why and when this happens, plus what you can do about it.

## What Causes Tingling Feelings in the Breast?

Many things are linked to this feeling, our experts say. First, we need to understand the main types of breast tingling that can happen, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine:

- **Cyclical breast pain:** Cyclical breast pain refers to pain that is aligned with the timing of your menstrual cycle. The exact reason for this pain is unknown, though it appears that the hormones estrogen and progesterone likely play a role. Because one breast can be more impacted than the other, however, it suggests the cause is more than just hormones, so more research into this topic is needed.
- **Noncyclic breast pain:** This type of breast tingling is not connected to hormonal fluctuations in the body and is instead linked to things like surgery, infections, and injuries, the NLM reports. Depending on the reason for this type, it tends to be in one spot, in one breast, and happens constantly or off-and-on.

Let's look now in depth at common reasons associated with these types of breast tingling:

### Menstruation

This is the most common cause of cyclical breast pain, Johns Hopkins Medicine reports. During the menstrual cycle, a woman's body produces estrogen, which stimulates milk ducts in the breasts in the weeks leading up to ovulation, explains Karla Olmedo, M.D., a medical oncologist and hematologist at City of Hope Orange County in Irvine, CA. Progesterone then stimulates the milk glands, she says. "Both hormones most likely cause the sensations of soreness, swelling, and pain in the breasts that women experience," Dr. Olmedo adds.

### Menopause

Even as you go through "the change," you can still experience tingling in the breast—hormonal fluctuations especially during perimenopause and then into menopause (most notably in women taking oral contraceptives or hormone therapy, according to Harvard Health Publishing, can be associated with this sensation as well.

### Pregnancy

Breast tingling can be a common sensation in pregnancy, points out Ezinne Ihenachor, M.D., a diagnostic radiologist and 2023-2024 breast imaging & mammography fellow at Stanford Health Care in Stanford, CA, especially in the first trimester. "Early pregnancy can induce hormonal changes that lead to tingling sensations in the breasts," Dr. Ihenachor explains. This is usually linked to a rise in the hormone progesterone, according to Health Service Executive (HSE).

### Breastfeeding

When a baby begins to suckle, the nerves in the breast send signals to the brain to release oxytocin, which then causes the milk ducts to contract and push milk towards the nipple. This process can create a tingling or prickling sensation in the breasts. Breastfeeding can also cause pain and sensations of being stretched when the breasts are engorged with milk, Dr. Olmedo explains.

### **Let-Down Reflex**

Also known as the “milk ejection reflex,” this is when milk is released from small sacs in your breasts into your nipple, the Cleveland Clinic says. It allows a baby to drink milk from the breast as part of breastfeeding. It can feel like a tingling sensation as it happens.

### **Mastitis**

This infection, or inflammation of breast tissue, can also cause tingling in your breast, among other symptoms (including hot and swollen breasts, body aches, chills, and fever, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine.) It happens when the milk ducts of breastfeeding women become blocked, Dr. Olmedo says. It can also occur when clothes chafe over the nipple, which might introduce bacteria into the breast.

### **Thrush**

This fungal infection can happen when nipples are damaged. Often, this damage occurs with breastfeeding and can mean a baby is not latched properly, your breasts are engorged with milk during pregnancy or while breastfeeding, or you aren’t using a breast pump correctly.

Other causes of nipple damage include friction from wearing clothes that are too tight, or breasts rubbing against fabric during intense exercise, or even skin conditions like eczema that lead to cracks or fissures in the skin, according to the Cleveland Clinic. The candida fungus that causes thrush then enters your breast via the cracked nipple.

These infections can also happen after you (or your baby) have taken antibiotics, which cut down on the amount of healthy bacteria in the body. Thrush can cause tingling in the breast, in addition to other symptoms including fever, a warm red patch on one breast, and other signs and symptoms, according to the NHS.

### **Nipple Vasospasm**

Nipple vasospasm occurs during or after breastfeeding when blood vessels constrict and spasm. When it happens in the fingers, it’s considered Raynaud’s phenomenon. It can happen because of nipple trauma and/or because of being in a cold environment. If you’re asking yourself, why do my breasts tingle between feedings, this might be it (or it might be an infection causing that, too).

### **Shingles**

When the chicken pox virus (herpes zoster) reactivates, it travels along nerve pathways to the skin, often causing a painful rash and other sensory disturbances, including tingling or burning sensations, according to Harvard Health Publishing. If shingles affects the nerves that supply the skin of the breast, it can lead to tingling, itching, or sharp pain in that area.

### **Breast Surgery**

This can be a leading cause of noncyclic breast pain. Tingling can happen when nerves are stimulated, points out [Steven Williams, M.D.](#), a board-certified plastic surgeon and president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), based in Dublin, CA. The stimulation can occur from several different sources common in breast surgeries, like a mastectomy or lumpectomy. “These include surgical trauma directly to the nerve or nerves, inflammation and swelling, which may sensitize nerves, stretch or pressure put on nerves, either as part of the intraoperative

procedure or as part of the surgery itself in the case of breast augmentation,” he says. Injecting numbing medicine can also cause nerves to respond to tingle, Dr. Williams adds.

### **Breast Implants**

If a silicone gel-filled breast implant ruptures (the chance of which increases by 1% each year you have them), it can cause a tingling sensation (and other signs and symptoms), the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reports.

### **Paget’s Disease**

A rare form of cancer, it can happen in both men and women, and affects the skin of the nipple and areola, according to the National Cancer Institute. One of the many symptoms can include breast tingling, which is a result of cancerous cells affecting the skin and nerves of the nipple and surrounding area.

### **Injuries**

The breast is supplied with numerous nerves, and any injury to the breast can cause damage or irritation to these nerves. This can result in sensations like tingling, numbness, or pain, says Dr. Ihenachor.

### **Heavy, Pendulous Breasts**

The weight of large, pendulous breasts can put pressure on the nerves in the chest, shoulders, and upper back. This compression can lead to tingling, numbness, or a pins-and-needles sensation, Dr. Ihenachor says.

### **Certain Medications**

Some medications can cause breast tingling as a side effect, Dr. Ihenachor says. One of those is hormone replacement therapy, she says. Others include some antidepressants, including selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressants; some oral birth control pills; some infertility treatments; some high blood pressure medications; and some antibiotics, according to the Mayo Clinic. Reasons for why these might cause breast tingling are likely linked to hormonal fluctuations associated with the medications themselves.

### **Home Remedies for Breast Tingling**

There are a number of things you can do at home to help reduce the pain from breast tingling, our experts say. They include:

- Breastfeed correctly. Make sure your baby has a proper “latch,” meaning they are attached correctly to the nipple to breastfeed, to prevent nipple damage that can lead to breast tingling, our experts recommend. You can seek help from a professional like a lactation consultant, who can assist you in achieving the right latch.
- Keep warm while breastfeeding. This can help manage or prevent vasospasm.
- Make dietary changes. Cutting back on caffeine (which might increase breast tingling), lowering your fat and sodium intake while increasing your fiber, might also assist, Dr. Cabeca says.

- Monitor symptoms. Keeping a journal of symptoms can help your doctor determine if your breast tingling is being caused by a cyclic or noncyclic reason, our experts point out. “Maintain a journal documenting the timing when the tingling occurs and any associated factors, such as menstrual cycle phases, dietary modifications, or stress levels,” Dr. Ihenachor suggests.
- Take over-the-counter medications. To help with pain and inflammation, try NSAIDs or acetaminophen, Dr. Cabeca suggests.
- Take supplements. Researchers have found that 200 IU of vitamin E twice daily with evening primrose oil for three months might help improve cyclic breast tingling in premenopausal women.
- Use compresses. Applying hot or cold compresses to the area affected can help, Dr. Cabeca says. Experiment to see which works better for you.
- Watch what you wear. It’s important to be properly fitted for a bra that supports your breasts (especially if they’re heavy and pendulous) and doesn’t cause undue friction, including when exercising, Dr. Ihenachor points out.

### Other Treatment Options

How your breast tingling is treated will be closely linked to the cause, our experts point out. For instance, mastitis is typically treated with antibiotics and draining the impacted breast—whereas an injury would be treated to help heal the area.

One medication, danazol, is the only FDA-approved medication for mastalgia, but it has many potential side effects so can be tough to keep taking, the NLM reports. Other medications, like tamoxifen (used to treat breast cancer), thyroid hormones, and birth control pills, might be used as well for breast tingling that is not resolving over time.

Your doctor will determine what treatment option might be best for you by determining why the breast tingling is happening in the first place—and to do so, they might use imaging like a breast ultrasound, mammogram, or breast biopsy.

### Talking With Your Doctor

So when should you tell your doctor about breast tingling? If you’re experiencing breast tingling and you’re 40 and older—the recommended age for your first mammogram—don’t wait until your next mammogram to talk to a doctor, especially if you’re experiencing a new symptom like breast tingling, Dr. Olmedo says.

“If a woman feels any new or unusual sensations in her breasts, she should see her doctor right away,” she says. “Even if the results from the last mammogram showed no cancer, she should tell her doctor about any changes in her breasts as soon as possible.”

Dr. Ihenachor agrees. If breast tingling is persistent, or accompanied by other symptoms including a lump, nipple discharge, or changes in breast appearance, seek medical advice ASAP, she says.

Because while tingling is not a typical symptom for a serious condition like breast cancer, it can affect overall quality of life—so patients should discuss their medical concerns with their physician as soon as possible, Dr. Williams adds.

<https://www.healthcentral.com/womens-health/tingling-in-breast>