

Itching Breasts

If your breast itches or you have a rash on your breast, you may be concerned as to what is causing it. The first step a healthcare provider will take is to observe your breasts to determine:

- Are one or both breasts involved?
- Is there a rash on one or both breasts?
- Does the rash cover the entire breast or is it only in one localized area?
- Is the nipple involved?
- If there is a rash, what does the rash look like?
- Are there blisters?
- Is there evidence of infection?
- How long has the breast(s) been itching?

Contact Dermatitis

Most causes of breast itching are from contact with materials or chemicals that irritate the skin in the area of contact. The area may only itch or it may become red and have a rash. If the itching or rash has recently begun, check to see if you are using any new soaps, body lotions, powders, laundry detergents or fabric softeners. Most contact dermatitis occurs several days after the irritating substance comes into contact with the skin (2 to 5 days). Spandex (elastic) is also another cause of itching for some women. If you have come into contact with any of these products, stop using them. Purchase a tube of cortisone cream from your pharmacy and apply it several times a day directly to the irritated or itching area. You may also take 25 to 50 mg of Benadryl (over-the-counter antihistamine) if the itching is extreme. If the cause is contact dermatitis, you should notice a reduction in irritation and itching within three to four days after applying the cortisone cream and discontinuing the use of the irritant product.

Cancerous Breast Conditions

There are some cancerous breast diseases that have symptoms that include itching and skin irritation.

Paget disease of the nipple, a type of breast cancer, often starts with itching of the nipple. Paget disease usually occurs on only one nipple and may also include:

- Persistent crustiness, scaliness or redness of the nipple
- Itching or burning of the nipple and surrounding areola
- Thickened skin on or around the nipple
- Discharge from the nipple; may be yellowish or bloody in color
- Flattening of the nipple

Often Paget disease is confused with breast eczema, a highly treatable condition. However, the signs of Paget disease do not typically disappear with routine treatment for eczema or infection and usually only affect one nipple. If you have experienced any of these symptoms on your breast(s), treat it with cortisone cream for several days; if it does not improve, contact your healthcare provider.

Another cancer, **inflammatory breast cancer**, may also start with itching of one breast. Signs and symptoms of inflammatory breast cancer include:

- Rapid increase in breast size; sometimes a cup size in a few days
- Itching that may be unrelenting and is unaffected by medicated creams or oral medications
- Pink, red or dark-colored area may appear on the skin
- Discoloration appears to be a bruise that does not go away
- Orange-peel skin (pin-point dimpling) may occur (called peau d'orange)
- Ridges and thickened areas of the skin may appear
- Breast is warm to the touch
- Color and texture changes of the areola may occur
- Discoloration ranges from a reddish-pink or reddish-purple to reddish-brown
- Swollen axillary lymph nodes or supraclavicular nodes may be felt
- Rarely, a lump may appear and can grow very rapidly (normally there is no evidence of a lump with IBC)
- Nipple flattening or retraction
- Nipple discharge occurs occasionally
- Breast pain may be constant or stabbing
- Discomfort ranges from tender to painful

Most itching and breast irritations are highly treatable. However, if the itching or rash does not go away after treatment, contact a healthcare provider as soon as possible to diagnose the cause of your discomfort.

Additional Information:
