Most women experience some breast pain and tenderness in their lives. Breast discomfort most often occurs in the two weeks before a menstrual period and in women who are taking hormones after menopause. It can also be caused by fibrocystic changes and irritation of chest wall muscles, ribs, or cartilage. **Pain is rarely a symptom of breast cancer.**

There are three methods used for early detection of breast cancer: mammogram, clinical breast exam, and breast self-exam. Kaiser Permanente recommends a screening mammogram every 1-2 years starting at the age of 40. Clinical breast exams should also be done on a regular basis. Talk to your physician about how often you should have this done as part of your Primary Care exams. We recommend breast self-exam monthly for all women. If you are menstruating, a good time to examine yourself is a few days after your period, when your breasts are less swollen or tender.

If you feel a lump or other change in your breast tissue, be sure to contact your physician. However, if there is no lump or abnormal finding on your mammogram, there is no need to worry about breast pain by itself.

**Here are some practical tips to help cope with breast pain:**

1. Wear a supportive bra especially during strenuous exercise.
2. Limit caffeine intake; that is, coffee, tea, and soft drinks.
3. Limit or eliminate sodium intake one week before your menstrual period.
4. Try for at least 20-30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.
5. Eat a low fat diet.
6. Take vitamin E (100 IU daily) or vitamin B6 (100 mg daily) to relieve discomfort or pain caused by breast cysts.
7. Take evening primrose oil capsules (7-10 percent GLA content) - 1,000-3,000 mg per day or other omega-3s. Not recommended for members with schizophrenia and/or those receiving medications for epilepsy.
8. Use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, if these have been approved for you by your physician. For example try ibuprofen 200-600 mg by mouth, 2-3 times a day for 1-2 weeks.
9. Apply moist heat to your chest 2-4 times a day.
10. Do not worry. Remember that pain is almost never an early symptom of breast cancer!

Some or all of these suggestions may help. Try one at a time, and if one helps your breast tenderness, there is no need to try the other suggestions.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.