

# Know About Non-Cancer (Benign) Breast Changes: Fibroepithelial Lesions

## For people who have breast changes

Read this brochure to learn:

- what are benign breast changes
- how are benign breast changes diagnosed
- what are fibroepithelial lesions
- what are my treatment options
- where do I get more information



## **What are benign (non-cancer) breast changes?**

Benign means not cancer. Benign breast changes are changes to your breast that are not cancer. Benign breast changes are very common.

These changes to your breast are not life-threatening. This means that they will not cause death. Some of these breast changes can cause you pain or discomfort. Most people have changes to their breasts during their life.

Most of these changes are caused by getting older or by changes in hormones (chemicals that help different parts of your body know how to work). Sometimes you will have no symptoms (signs) of these changes at all.

Always get breast or nipples changes like those listed below looked at by your family doctor or your oncologist (cancer doctor).

Lumps:

- A lump (mass) or a firm feeling in or near your breast
- A lump under your arm
- Thick or firm tissue in or near your breast
- Change in the size or shape of your breast

Nipple discharge (fluid that comes out by itself without squeezing) or other changes to your nipples:

- Nipple discharge (fluid that is not breast milk)
- Nipple discharge that is bloody
- Nipple changes (nipple that points inward into the breast)

Skin changes:

- Skin on your breast that is itchy, red, scaling, dimpled or puckered

## How are benign breast changes diagnosed (found)?

Some benign breast changes can be felt during an exam (physical check) by your doctor or when you do a self-exam (check your breasts yourself).

Some benign breast conditions are found by:

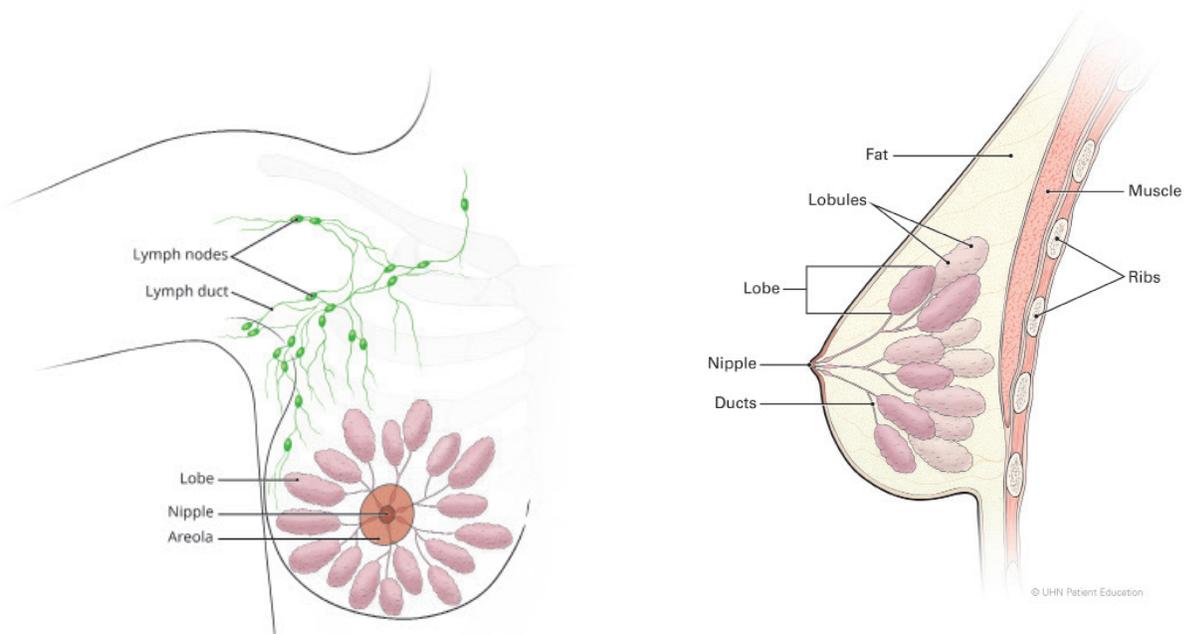
- a mammogram (breast x-ray), or
- an ultrasound (a safe, painless test that uses sound waves to make images of the breast)

Sometimes a biopsy (when a small sample of the breast is removed for testing) is needed to know what type of benign breast change you have.

Read below to learn about the parts of your breast.

## What are the different parts of the breast?

The images above show the parts of the breast that can be affected by benign breast conditions.



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Breasts are made up of these main parts:

- Nipple
- Lobules (glands that make milk)
- Milk ducts (part of the breast that moves milk toward the nipple for breast-feeding)
- Fat
- Supportive tissue (supports parts of your breast)
- Connective tissue (connects parts of your breast)

Together, the milk ducts and lobules are called glandular breast tissue. The supportive tissue, fat and connective tissue are called stromal breast tissue. Benign breast conditions can affect both kinds of breast tissue.

### **What are fibroepithelial lesions?**

There are 2 types of fibroepithelial lesions:

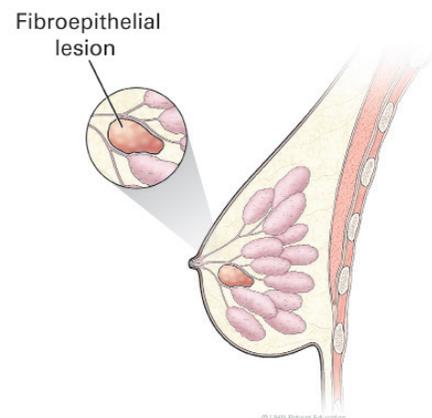
- fibroadenoma
- phyllodes tumour

These breast lumps are made up of both glandular and stromal types of breast tissue.

### **Fibroadenoma**

These breast lumps are:

- the most common benign breast change
- often painless
- smooth, rubbery and move a lot under the skin
- may slowly grow bigger over time



The image above shows what a fibroepithelial lesions looks like.

## **Phyllodes Tumour**

These breast lumps are:

- the most rare benign breast change
- often painless but some may be painful
- smooth, rubbery and move a lot under the skin
- usually benign (non-cancer). It is rare for them to be cancer.
- may quickly grow bigger

## **What are my treatment options?**

Fibroadenoma

- Sometimes a biopsy is needed to make sure the lump is a fibroadenoma.
- Sometimes you will need no treatment is needed at all. fibroadenomas may go away on their own.
- You may have follow-up ultrasounds to make sure the fibroadenoma does not get bigger over time.
- If the fibroadenoma gets bigger, you may need to have it be removed by surgery to make sure the lump is benign (non-cancer).

## **Phyllodes Tumours**

- Phyllodes tumours need to be removed by surgery. This is because there is a very small chance that the tumour may be cancer.
- Some normal breast tissue will also be removed from around the tumour. This prevents the tumour from growing back.
- Sometimes a second surgery may be needed to remove more normal tissue to make sure that the tumour does not grow back.

## Where can I get more information about breast changes?

Visit these websites:

- National Cancer Institute – Breast Cancer  
[www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/breast](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/breast)
- American Cancer Society – Non-cancerous breast conditions  
[www.cancer.org/healthy/findcancerearly/womenshealth/non-cancerousbreastconditions/index](http://www.cancer.org/healthy/findcancerearly/womenshealth/non-cancerousbreastconditions/index)

Or visit the Patient & Family Library (main floor of The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre).

Phone: 416 946 4501 ext. 5383

Website: [www.library.theprincessmargaret.ca](http://www.library.theprincessmargaret.ca)



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