

Breast infection

Definition

A breast infection is an infection in the tissue of the breast.

Alternative Names

Mastitis; Infection - breast tissue;
Breast abscess

Causes

Breast infections are usually caused by a common bacteria found on normal skin (*Staphylococcus aureus*). The bacteria enter through a break or crack in the skin, usually the nipple.

The infection takes place in the parenchymal (fatty) tissue of the breast and causes swelling. This swelling pushes on the milk ducts. The result is pain and swelling of the infected breast.

Breast infections usually occur in women who are breast-feeding. Breast infections that are not related to breast-feeding must be distinguished from a rare form of breast cancer.

Symptoms

- Breast pain
- Breast lump
- Breast enlargement on one side only
- Swelling, tenderness, redness, and warmth in breast tissue
- Nipple discharge (may contain pus)
- Nipple sensation changes
- Itching
- Tender or enlarged lymph nodes in armpit on the same side
- Fever

Exams and Tests

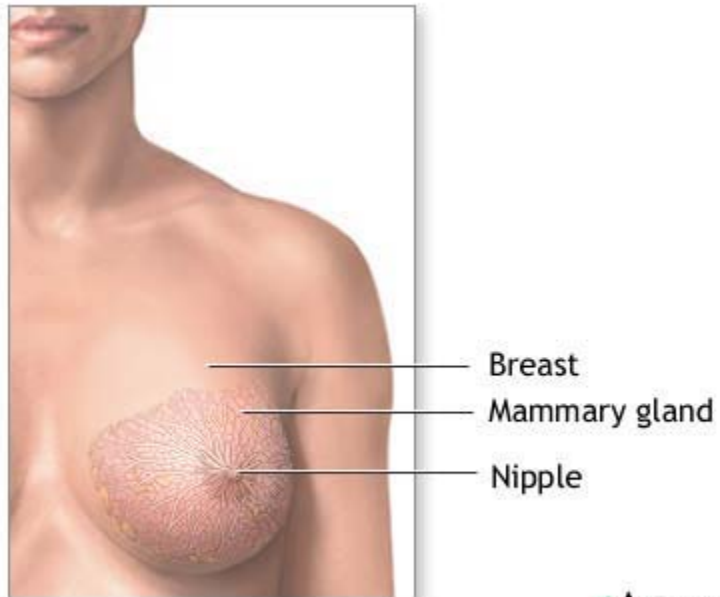
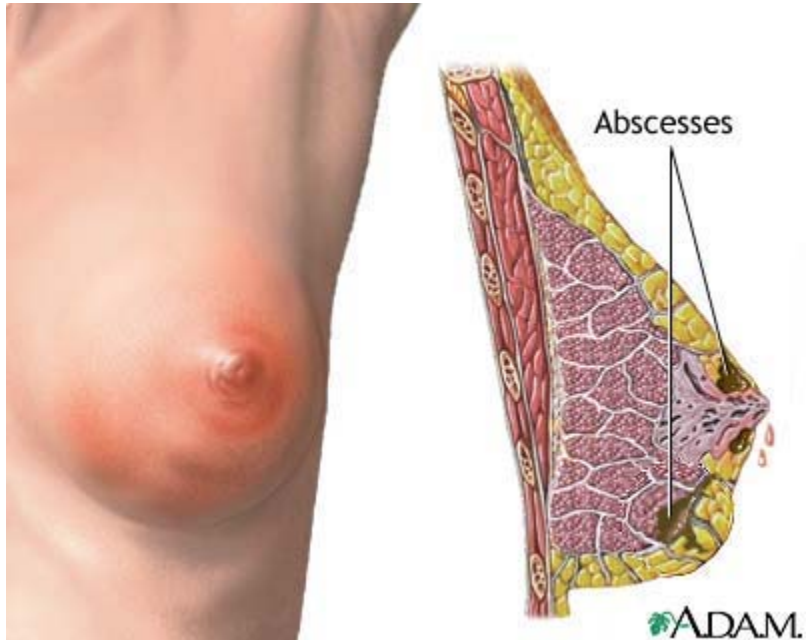
In women who are not breast-feeding, testing may include mammography or breast biopsy. Otherwise, tests are usually not necessary.

Treatment

Self-care may include applying moist heat to the infected breast tissue for 15 to 20 minutes four times a day.

Antibiotic medications are usually very effective in treating a breast infection. You are encouraged to continue to breast-feed or to pump to relieve breast engorgement (from milk production) while receiving treatment.

Outlook (Prognosis)



The condition usually clears quickly with antibiotic therapy.

Possible Complications

In severe infections, an abscess may develop. Abscesses require more extensive treatment, including surgery to drain the area. Women with abscesses may be told to temporarily stop breast-feeding.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Call your health care provider if any portion of the breast tissue becomes reddened, tender, swollen, or hot, or if the lymph nodes in the armpit become tender or swollen.

Prevention

Good breast care, especially after delivery and while breast-feeding, may reduce the risk of breast infections.

Notes:



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