Most women have changes in their breasts during their lifetime. Many breast changes are caused by hormones. It is normal to have breast changes at different times in your menstrual cycle.

**Before or During Your Menstrual Periods**

Before or during your menstrual periods, your breasts may feel swollen, tender, or painful. You may also feel one or more lumps during this time because of extra fluid in your breasts. These changes usually go away by the end of your menstrual cycle. If you have one of these breast changes that doesn’t go away by the end of your menstrual cycle, make an appointment with your health care provider to get it checked.

Young women who have not gone through menopause often have more dense breast tissue. Dense tissue has more glandular and connective tissue and less fat tissue. This makes mammograms harder to interpret. This is because both dense tissue and tumors show up as solid white areas on X-ray images. Breast tissue gets less dense as women get older.

**Pregnancy and Breastfeeding**

During pregnancy, your breasts may feel lumpy. This is usually because the glands that produce milk are growing. You may also have a milky discharge.

While breastfeeding, you can get a condition called mastitis. This happens when a milk duct becomes blocked. Mastitis causes the breast to look red and feel lumpy, warm, and tender. It may be caused by an infection and it is often treated with antibiotics. Sometimes the duct needs to be drained. If the mastitis does not go away with treatment, call your health care provider.

**As You Near Menopause**

Other breast changes can be caused by the normal aging process. As you near menopause, your breasts may lose tissue and fat. Your menstrual periods may come less often. Your hormone levels also change. This can make your breasts become smaller and feel tender and more lumpy. Most of these changes are benign (not cancer). However, if you notice a breast change, make an appointment to get it checked by your health care provider.

If you take hormones (such as hormone replacement therapy, birth control pills, or injections), your breasts may become more dense. This can make a mammogram harder to interpret. Be sure to let your health care provider know if you take hormones.

**After Menopause**

When you stop having menstrual periods, this is called menopause. At this time your hormone levels drop and your breast tissue becomes less dense and more fatty. You may stop having any lumps, pain, or nipple discharge that you used to have. And because your breast tissue is less dense, mammograms may be easier to interpret.

If you feel a lump in your breast or have nipple discharge after menopause, make an appointment to have it checked.

**Where Can I Get More Information?**

Contact Huntsman Cancer Institute’s Breast Imaging Clinic at 801-213-4269 or the G. Mitchell Morris Cancer Learning Center:

- Call toll free 1-888-424-2100
- Visit the sixth floor of the cancer hospital
- E-mail patient.education@hci.utah.edu
- Text “askhci” to 66746