

## FLUID-FILLED CYSTS

### What is a fluid-filled cyst?

- A cyst is a tissue sac filled with fluid. They are most often moveable, round lumps and may be subject to rapid changes in size during the menstrual cycle.
- They can be tender and some can appear overnight.
- Cysts do not turn into breast cancer, and having cysts does not put a woman at risk for developing cancer.

### Simple Cyst:

- Found deep or shallow in breast tissue.
- A cyst can vary in size.
- Cysts often get larger and feel tender just before a menstrual period.
- Cysts deep in the breast may feel more like a firm lump and bulge out the overlying tissue.

### Small Multiple Cysts:

- Tiny cysts may be found in groups, like a bunch of grapes or scattered throughout the breast.
- In fibrocystic condition the cysts can occur in the breast ducts and the lobules.
- Cyst changes are often found in both breasts, producing a feeling of “lumpiness”.
- Often you can easily locate cysts, moving them freely under your fingers like a small blister in the breast tissue. They are smooth on the outside and “squishy” when pressed upon. If the cyst is full of fluid, however, it may be firm.
- Most often women between 35 and 55 years have these changes because of their hormone levels are relatively high or irregular. The exact cause of cysts is not yet known.

### Diagnosis:

- Doctors and nurses diagnose cysts from a woman’s history, physical examination, ultrasound, mammography, and/or needle aspiration.
- A cyst diagnosed by ultrasound does not need to be drained.
- Draining, however, is available if a cyst is large and painful.

**Needle Aspiration:**

The doctor inserts a needle attached to a syringe into the fluid-filled sac and draws out the fluid, collapsing the cyst like a small punctured balloon. Cysts often fill back up after they have been drained.

**What is the Treatment?**

- Symptom improvement has been achieved with lifestyle changes such as dietary fat reduction, regular exercise, and stress management.
- The primary goal of treatment is symptom improvement and relief of anxiety (by ruling out a breast cancer).
- Re-examination at regular intervals by both you and your physician is important, as cyst formation may occur at any time until the menopause.
- All new lumps must be assessed to assure they are fluid-filled cysts and not solid.

***This information is of a general nature and may vary according to your special circumstances. If you have specific questions, please contact your physician or appropriate health care professional.***

**References:**

1. Kneece, J. (2003). *Finding a lump in your breast. Where to go...what to do* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Columbia: EduCare Inc.
2. Lauersen, N. & Stukane, E. (1998). *The complete book of breast care*. New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group.
3. Love, S. (2000). *Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Cambridge: Perseus.