

Put an End to Post-Workout Breast Pain

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You know all the conventional ways to Relieve Sore Muscles After Overtraining—ice the area, stretch it out, maybe even pop a painkiller or two. But it's hard to know if those same rules apply when the pain is in a more, ahem, sensitive spot, such as your breasts.

Breast soreness as a result of exercise is surprisingly common. In a study in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, more than half of well-endowed women and 25 percent of those who wore an A cup or smaller reported experiencing it.

“There are a couple of ways exercise causes breast pain,” explains ob-gyn Alyssa Dweck, M.D., author of *V is for Vagina*. “One of the more common culprits is muscular strain, which can occur from strength training.” But, she says, high-impact exercises like running can also stress the muscles and ligaments in your chest, causing discomfort and soreness—especially if you're wearing a less-than-supportive bra. Another way your bra can cause injury is via the underwire, which can become damaged or misshapen and pierce or otherwise hurt your breast tissue, she says.

A perhaps more well-known cause of breast pain: “Runner's nipple, the result of friction between your sensitive nipples and exercise clothing, causing extreme tenderness, inflammation, and even bleeding,” **explains Franci Cohen, a personal trainer and exercise physiologist based in New York City.**

The best way to stop pain is to wear a good, supportive sports bra, says Cohen. Consider getting professionally sized to ensure you have the right fit, and think about splurging on a slightly higher-end option. They tend to use better quality materials that will hold up for longer and are less likely to cause painful friction. If your nipple does become irritated, applying an antibacterial ointment like Neosporin Plus Pain Relief (\$6, drugstore.com) can help.

No matter how great a sports bra you wear, though, it's pretty much inevitable that you'll feel sore after doing certain chest exercises. As you get stronger, the discomfort should go away or diminish, says Cohen. (Many women are also naturally predisposed to breast pain in the week or so before their periods, which Dweck says can up their chances of discomfort at the gym.) If you do feel achy post-workout, you can ice your breasts and take NSAIDs like ibuprofen as you would for any other sore body part.

But if the pain doesn't go away, even after you take NSAIDs, or you notice a lump, bruising, or unusual nipple discharge, see your doctor ASAP—these could be signs of a more serious problem like breast cancer, says Dweck.

A final tip: If you're a java fan (or you take caffeine-containing preworkout supplements), you may want to consider cutting back, advises Dweck. “Caffeine can make breasts more cystic and tender.” Sure, you might feel a little sluggish at first. But that's a small price to pay for a more comfortable workout.