



BREAST HEALTH



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BREASTS – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Understanding your breasts and how they change while you mature is important.

Girls normally start to develop breasts between the ages of 7 and 13. Breast size and shape can change throughout your life, with many women noticing changes in line with their periods.

In order to maintain good breast health, it is important that you regularly examine your breasts and seek the advice of a medical professional if you have any concerns.

Breasts can be unique in shape and size. You may find that each of your breasts are slightly different, so it's important that you know them well.



WHAT IS A BREAST?

The breast is made of fat and glandular tissue, and does not contain any muscle to support them.

Support for the breast tissue is provided by **two weak supporting structures**,

1.
The skin

2.
Cooper's ligaments*

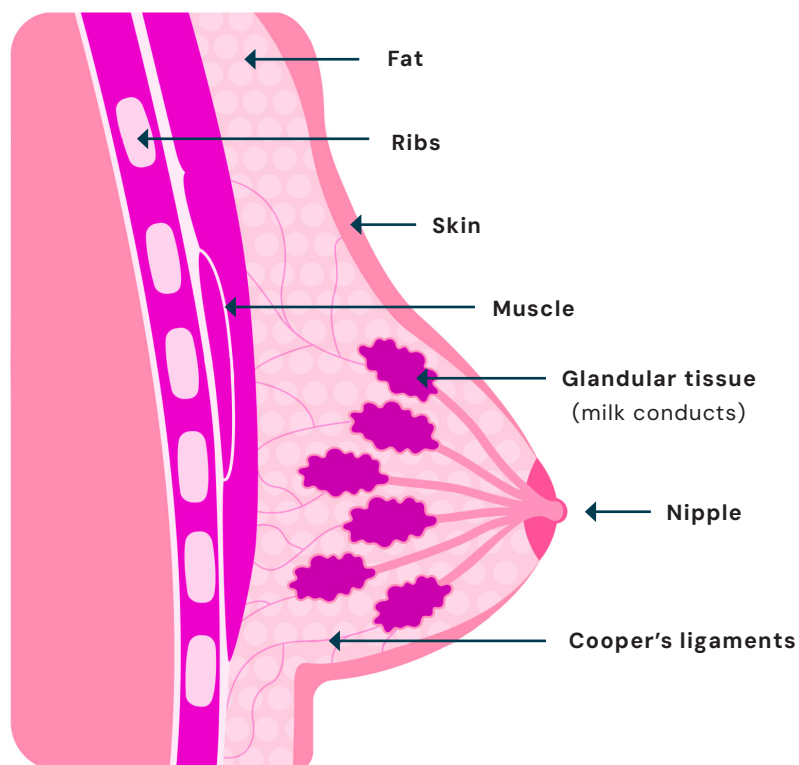
This presents **challenges** when playing rugby, which can be divided into **two problems**:

1.
Breast movement

2.
Breast impacts

These problems are easier to manage with a better knowledge and understanding of how and why the breast moves, and potential solutions in how to minimise this.

* Cooper's ligaments – means the breast is prone to a lot of movement



BREAST MOVEMENT

Why can breast movement cause issues?

The lack of natural support in the breast means that when we move, the breast moves. This then exerts a load/force on the supporting structures of the breasts, which in turn exerts a load on the upper body. This can present challenges in terms of:

1. Performance

Excessive breast movement can influence how quickly an athlete breathes which can impact their stride length when running. In a rugby setting this could mean that an athlete would cover less ground and take longer to get to where they want to on the pitch.

To prevent breast injuries, contact sports participants may modify or limit running or playing activities i.e., avoid tackling.

2. Participation

1 in 4 women and half of girls perceive their breasts to be a barrier to exercise due to pain, movement and/or embarrassment. This can lead to decreased participation in sport.

Educating players, coaches and support staff on potential issues may help to reduce these figures.

Why should you pay attention to breast movement?

If the breasts are not properly supported when playing, their movement can be considerable and can negatively impact on performance.

Some important facts to consider about your breasts when playing sport:

- If not properly supported, breasts can move up to **15 cm** and accelerate faster than a race car.
- **51%** of female GB athletes at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics reported experiencing breast pain.
- Movement related breast pain is reported to affect up to **50%** of exercising women.
- Many athletes experience skin friction injuries due to poor bra choice.

Breast movement during sport can cause pain, damage, and reduce performance. In athletic populations breast and bra knowledge is low leading to poor bra choices. This is why education on these issues for athletes as well as coaches and others is so important.

If we reduce breast movement we can not only improve performance but also limit breast pain and the risk of damaging the breast tissue.

BREAST IMPACTS

Important facts about impacts to the breasts:

- Research in contact team sports found that **58%** of players had experienced a breast injury. [1] Based on these numbers it is likely that rugby would have a similar or higher rate of breast injury.
- The majority of players are unlikely to wear breast/chest padding – one study reported only 17% of female Australian Football League (AFL), Rugby League, Union and 7s players used breast/chest padding.[1]
- **48%** of contact team sports players feel that breast impacts are likely to have a negative effect on performance.
- Injuries as a result of breast impact are likely to be under-reported and under-treated as coaches and other support staff unlikely to be aware of the problem.
- Repeated breast impacts are likely to cause pain, bruising, and tissue damage which can lead to complications with breast screening.

It is important that we encourage rugby players, coaches and support staff to create a supportive environment where players feel comfortable to disclose an injury when it happens.

Types of breast impact

Breast injuries can occur from impacts with:

- The ball
- Players
- The ground
- Grappling
- Lying on the floor

All of these can lead to the compressing of breast tissue and can result in pain, tenderness, bruising, swelling, scar tissue and lumps (fat necrosis).

Scar tissue and lumps often mimic breast cancer, leading to difficulties in breast cancer screening. Therefore, it is recommended that an athlete with a history of breast trauma reports this when having a routine breast exam and/or a mammogram.

BREAST HEALTH

What can we do to encourage better breast health?

Here are four things that clubs and women and girls can do:

1. **Prioritize having a properly fitted sports bra.**
2. **Encourage rugby players to report breast injuries and support staff to record these injuries.**



3. **Apply breast padding**

4. **Be breast aware**



The purpose of breast padding in rugby is to reduce impacts to the breast and therefore reduce the risk of breast injury. It is specific to female players and should be designed and constructed to minimize discomfort.

As breast padding is not usually designed to support the breast or to replace a sports bra, players are recommended to use a sports bra underneath any breast padding.

Regulations from World Rugby allows for padding that covers the chest, under the arm or integrated into the shoulder. It should also never restrict normal playing movement.

What to look for in breast padding?

If you are investing in breast padding make sure that it is:

- Smooth and with rounded edges, and no ridges on the inside or outside that could harm the wearer or other players.
- Comfortable and works alongside your sports bra.
- World Rugby Approved – look for the appropriate labels.

For more information about breast padding and other forms of body padding visit [World Rugby](https://www.worldrugby.org)



BE BREAST AWARE

What is being 'Breast Aware'?

Being 'Breast Aware' can help you look after your breasts and detect the signs of any health problems, such as breast cancer:

1. Know how your breasts normally look and feel
2. Regularly look and feel for changes
3. Tell someone if you notice anything different
4. Check your breasts, under your arms, under your breasts and around your collarbone.

Breast lumps don't always mean cancer. Changes in breast tissue are normal when they are growing or developing. Other causes of breast lumps could be non-cancerous tissue growth (fibroadenoma), a build-up of fluid, or non-cancerous cyst.

Changes to look and feel for

- A lump that feels different to usual
- A rash on the breast or nipple
- Discharge (liquid) from one or both of your nipples
- Skin texture changing – puckering or dimpling, a bit like orange peel
- A swelling in your armpit or around your collarbone
- A sudden change in size or shape
- Constant unusual pain in your breast or your armpit
- Your nipple suddenly becoming inverted (pulled in) or changing direction

Do not try to self-diagnose the cause of breast lumps. Always speak to your doctor or health professional if you are worried.



Things that WON'T give you breast cancer

- Injuring the breast
- Breast implants
- Wearing an underwired bra
- Using deodorant

Leading a healthy and balanced life can help prevent breast cancer, as can:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Keeping physically active
- Eating a balanced diet
- Limiting your alcohol intake

How should I check my breasts?

The following websites provide helpful information about breast health.

<https://www.bra.edu.au/>

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/breast-self-examination>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/how-to-check-your-breasts-or-chest/>

<https://www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg/get-screened/breast-cancer/breast-self-examination.html>

<https://www.ais.gov.au/fphi/education>

<https://netballher.co.uk/menstrual-cycle/>

<https://www.always.co.uk/en-gb/tips-and-advice-for-women/>

<https://hpsnz.org.nz/wellbeing-and-engagement/healthy-women-in-performance-sport/the-menstrual-cycle-and-sport/>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/breast-cancer>

RESEARCH STUDY REFERENCES

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