

Disappearing breast cysts

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Abstract

The natural history of simple breast cysts is illustrated by our patient with multiple palpable cysts which disappeared completely over a six month period. Interval mammography is all that is required in these patients.

Case report

A 52 year-old woman was referred for a mammogram because of a palpable mass in the outer quadrant of the right breast. Mammography (Figure 1) demonstrated multiple, well defined masses bilaterally. There was no microcalcification or spiculation. Ultrasound confirmed that these were simple cysts. Cyst puncture was not

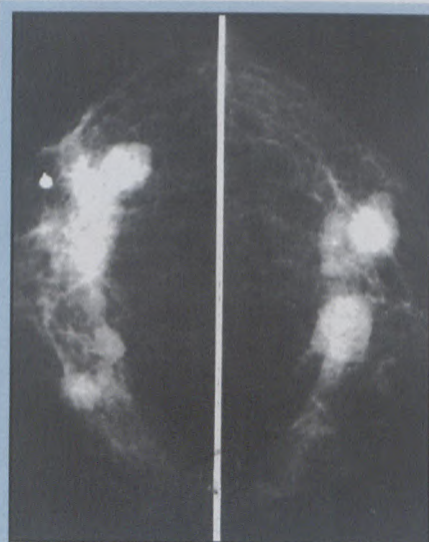


Figure 1: Initial crano caudal mammogram demonstrates bilateral breast cysts.

performed. A repeat mammogram was advised after six months. This demonstrated that the previous cysts had resolved completely (Figure 2).

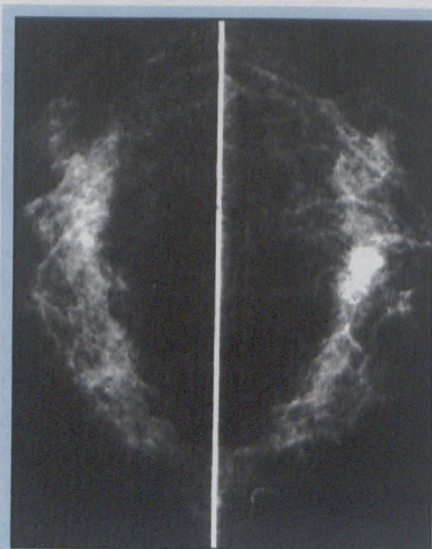


Figure 2: Follow-up mammogram after a six month interval confirms disappearance of the cysts.

Discussion

Breast cysts are common, occurring in 30-50% of women at autopsy.¹ The peak incidence is between 40-49 years of age. The reason why cysts disappear is unknown but is probably due to changing oestrogen levels as they frequently regress after menopause. Our patient is unusual as the cysts disappeared so rapidly.

Screening programmes have demonstrated that more than 50% of interval cysts resolve within one year and by two years, two-thirds had disappeared. At five years less than 12% of cysts were unchanged.²

The cause of simple breast cysts is unclear. They originate from the terminal ductule lobular unit. They are thought to result from coalescence of lobular acini during ductule involution or from ductule obstruction. The cyst wall is composed of cuboidal to columnar epithelium which is often multilayered but can be atrophic.³ Occasionally cysts develop following duct ectasia, fat necrosis, or oestrogen administration.⁴

Patients are often asymptomatic although pain and tenderness may occur from fluid tension in the cysts. The cysts vary in size with the menstrual cycle.⁴

On mammography, breast cysts are indistinguishable from other benign masses especially fibroadenomas - however ultrasound confirmation of a simple cyst establishes the diagnosis.

Interval annual mammography is all that is required in these patients to confirm cyst regression.

References

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