



WOMEN & GIRLS HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Breast Health

CONTENTS

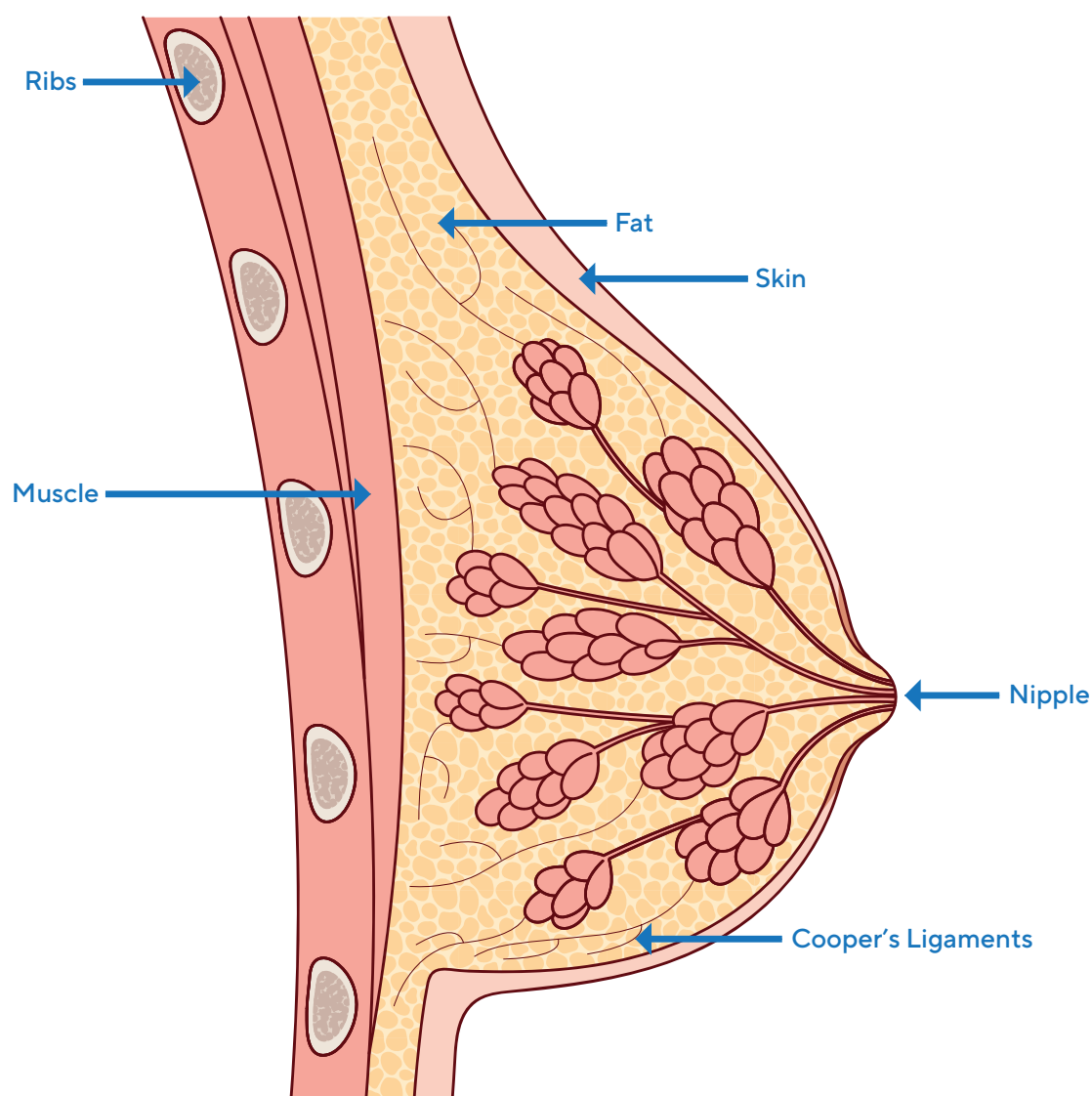
What is a breast?	3
Breast movement	4
Breast impact	5
Breast health	6
Be breast aware	8
Research study references	9

WHAT IS A BREAST?

The breast is made of fat and glandular tissue, and does not contain any muscle. As you can see from the diagram below, with only two weak supporting structures, the skin and the Cooper's ligaments, the breast is highly deformable.

Within rugby, this lack of natural support for the breasts, affects:

- BREAST MOVEMENT
- BREAST IMPACTS



These problems are easier to manage with a better knowledge and understanding of how and why the breast moves.

BREAST MOVEMENT

Why breast movement can 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 affects:

PERFORMANCE

Excessive breast movement can influence rugby performance in several ways. For example, it can influence an athlete's breathing rate and make them feel like they are working harder. It can also impact their stride length when running, which could slow movement across the pitch.

PARTICIPATION

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

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

Why should you pay attention to breast movement?

If the breast is not properly supported, its movement in rugby is likely to be considerable and to negatively affect performance. Some important facts about breasts in a sports context:

If not properly supported, breasts can move up to **15cm** and accelerate faster than an F1 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 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.

Remember!

A supportive and correctly fitted bra will decrease breast movement, reducing breast pain and discomfort, and can lead to improved performance.

BREAST IMPACT

Important facts about breast impact

- In a study of 483 female rugby players from 29 countries, 28.5% reported that they had experienced a contact breast injury.
- 20% of rugby players who have experienced contact breast injuries report a negative effect on their match performance.
- Breast impacts and injuries are likely to be underreported and underestimated by coaches and support staff.
- Repeated breast impacts are likely to cause pain, bruising, and tissue damage which can lead to complications with breast screening.

It is important to encourage rugby players, coaches and support staff to create a supportive environment where people feel comfortable to speak up.

Types of breast impact

It is important to remember that we are not just talking about direct impacts on the breast.

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 result in pain, tenderness, bruising, swelling, scar tissue and lumps (fat necrosis).

Scar tissue can be mistaken for a lump in the breast which can cause anxiety to the female rugby players. Therefore it is recommended that any lump is appropriately checked by a doctor or appropriately trained health professional – you may want to mention to the health professional that you play rugby and may have sustained a breast injury.



BREAST HEALTH

What can we do to encourage better breast health?

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



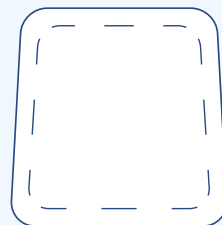
Prioritise having a supportive and correctly fitted sports bra



Rugby players and support staff are encouraged to record breast injuries and treatment



Be breast aware check your breasts regularly



Consider using breast strapping or padding, if required

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 minimise 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.

What to look for in breast padding?

Regulations from World Rugby allows for padding that covers soft breast tissue, under the arm or with an integrated shoulder. It should also never restrict normal playing movement.

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

- Smooth, with rounded edges and no ridges on the inside or outside that could harm you or other players.
- Comfortable and works alongside your sports bra.
- World Rugby Approved – some but not all brands will have the appropriate approval labels.

Remember! Breast padding is a personal choice, it's important that it does what it is supposed to do in terms of reducing impacts you may experience while allowing you to perform at your best.



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:

- ☐ Know how your breasts normally look and feel
- ☐ Regularly look and feel for changes
- ☐ Tell someone if you notice anything different
- ☐ 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, and breasts may also feel different across the menstrual cycle. 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

DO NOT TRY TO SELF-DIAGNOSE the cause of breast lumps. Always speak to your GP if you are worried.

- 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

If you are worried about anything to do with your breasts it is always a good idea to talk to someone.

Things that **WON'T** give you breast cancer

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

How should I check my breasts? <https://www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/how-to-check-your-breasts-or-chest/>

Things that can reduce your risk of breast cancer are:

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

REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

References:

Bibby, K., Kenny, I. C., Cahalan, R., Purtill, H., & Comyns, T.M. (2025). The awareness, knowledge, and experience of female rugby players of contact breast injuries and exercise induced breast pain - An international survey. *Science & Sports*, 40(1), 75-82.

Brisbine, B. R., Steele, J. R., Phillips, E. J., & McGhee, D. E. (2020). Use and perception of breast protective equipment by female contact football players. *Journal of science and medicine in sport*, 23 (9), 820-825.

Bibby, K., Comyns, T. M., Cahalan, R., Purtill, H., & Kenny, I. C. (2024). How are female rugby players affected by contact breast injuries and exercise-induced breast pain – an international survey. *Research in Sports Medicine*, 1-10.

Wakefield – Scurr, J., St John, E., Bibby, K., Renwick, N., Smith, N., Hobbs, S., & Brown, N. (2024) Insights into breast health issues in women's rugby. *European Journal of Sports Science*, 24(12), 1735-1742.

Genova, R., and R. F. Garza. 2024. "Breast Fat Necrosis." In StatPearls. StatPearls Publishing.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK542191/>.

Gokgoz, M. S., Turan, C. Yilidirir, and T. Ceran. 1998. "Isolated Breast Trauma." *Turkish Journal of Trauma and Emergency Surgery* 4(1): 81-3.

Additional Resources

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/24733938.2019.1682184#:~:text=Results%3A%20Fifty%2Deight%20percent%20of,injury%20affected%20their%20football%20performance.>

About the Author

Thank you to the Rugby Football Union (RFU) for granting permission to Scottish Rugby to adapt and develop this resource from the RFU's RugbySafe Female Health & Welfare Toolkit, funded by the Rugby World Cup 2025 Impact Programme. The RFU is delivering the Rugby World Cup 2025 Impact Programme in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), Sport England, and UK Sport. This programme aims to transform and accelerate the accessibility of rugby for women and girls.