

Evidence Discussion (BR 10.1)

BREAST EVALUATION IN PREGNANT OR LACTATING FEMALES

Pregnancy-associated breast cancer (PABC) is defined as breast cancer diagnosed during pregnancy, throughout the first postpartum year, or during lactation.

The most common presentation of PABC is a palpable mass, but >8% of palpable masses that are biopsied in pregnant and breastfeeding women are benign. (1)

Given the difficulty examining the pregnant and lactating individual, diagnostic breast imaging is crucial in characterizing the features of a palpable mass. In up to 20% of lactating women, isolated bloody nipple discharge without an associated mass can occur, most commonly due to benign etiologies. However, if persistent, bloody nipple discharge can also be a sign of breast cancer. Diagnostic imaging is also recommended in these women.

Ultrasound has the highest sensitivity for the diagnosis of PABC. (2, 3). Additionally, both pregnant and lactating women are predominantly young and have dense breast tissue. Therefore the sensitivity of mammography decreases in these women. For that reason, ultrasound is the first-line imaging in pregnant and lactating women. (4)

Advanced imaging with breast MRI has a limited role in pregnant women. The IV administration of gadolinium is contraindicated. If there is clinical suspicion of malignancy, a biopsy is the next step in evaluation. (5,6)

1. [Breast imaging of the pregnant and lactating patient: physiologic changes and common benign entities - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
2. [Reducing delay in the diagnosis of pregnancy-associated breast cancer: how imaging can help us - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
3. [Pregnancy- and lactation-associated breast cancer: mammographic and sonographic findings - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
4. [Pregnancy- and lactation-associated breast cancer: mammographic and sonographic findings - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
5. [ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Breast Imaging of Pregnant and Lactating Women - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
6. [Breast Imaging of the Pregnant and Lactating Patient: Imaging Modalities and Pregnancy-Associated Breast Cancer | AJR \(ajronline.org\)](#)