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Infections in the Breast – Common Imaging Presentations and Mimics

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Introduction

While breast imaging focuses on cancer detection, infections of the breast may occur, especially during the postpartum period. They can occur at any age and be related to a variety of predisposing conditions, such as body piercing, smoking, immunocompromised state, or underlying systemic disease. Although often localized to the breast as an acute or chronic primary process, some systemic processes can involve the breast as a secondary site.

Mastitis and Breast Abscess

Mastitis is a focal or diffuse breast infection. Puerperal mastitis is more common and occurs during the immediate postpartum period (Fig 1, ppt slide 1), Patients typically present with breast tenderness and enlargement, warmth, erythema, skin thickening, and swelling. It is often diagnosed clinically and responds to antibiotics. Chronic mastitis, more commonly seen in the non-puerperal state, presents with asymmetric breast thickening, palpable lump, nipple discharge, and/or axillary lymphadenopathy¹. Fever and systemic symptoms are infrequent.

Breast abscess almost always occurs as a complication of infectious mastitis²⁻⁴, presenting as a palpable lump frequently involving the retroareolar region². If there is clinical

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