

Gynecomastia

Enlarged Breast Tissue in Men and Boys

What is Gynecomastia?

Gynecomastia (guy-nuh-ko-mas-tee-ah) is swelling of the breast tissue in males. This can happen in one or both breasts. It often begins as a small lump beneath the nipple. The breast tissue may grow at different rates and to different sizes. Most often, it is not cancer. Male breast cancer is very rare.

What Causes Male Breast Growth?

Common causes for adult men include:

- Hormone imbalance - All men have both androgens and estrogens. Often, male breast growth is caused by changes in the levels of these hormones.
 - Androgens (an-dro-jens) are hormones that create male features, such as hair growth, muscle size, and a deep voice
 - Estrogens (es-tro-jens) are hormones that create female features
- Other health conditions
 - Thyroid disorders
 - Liver disease
 - Lung disease
 - Malnutrition
 - Weight gain
- Medicine side effects
 - Depression
 - High blood pressure
 - Heart conditions
 - Ulcer therapies
 - Cancer and/or prostate treatments
- Anabolic steroids or androgens to enhance athletic performance
- Street drugs- such as:
 - Heroin
 - Marijuana
 - Amphetamines
 - Methadone
- Abuse of alcohol
- Dietary supplements such as:
 - Some plant oils
 - Possibly protein powders containing whey protein, casein and phytoestrogens

Facts About Large Male Breasts

Most cases occur in newborns, in boys going through puberty, or in older men.

Newborns

Large male breasts are often caused by hormones from the mother. Breast buds (lumps under the nipple) are common in baby boys and can produce small amounts of milky white nipple discharge. Do not squeeze out the discharge. The lumps tend to resolve by 6 months of age, but it can last longer in some babies.

Teen Boys

Between ages 11-17, gynecomastia is caused by the hormone changes of puberty. More than half of boys develop gynecomastia during puberty. It is common to feel a firm or rubbery lump under one or both nipples. In most cases, the swollen breast tissue will go away without treatment within 6 months to 2 years.

Adult Males

Gynecomastia becomes common again between the ages of 50 and 80. At least 1 out of 4 men in this age group is affected. It is common to feel a firm or rubbery tender lump under the nipple in one or both breasts.

When to Contact Your Provider

Call your health care provider if you notice:

- Recent swelling, pain, or tenderness in one or both breasts
- Discharge from one or both nipples
- Nipple retraction – a nipple turning inward that had been standing out
- Skin changes including: a skin sore, an ulcer over the breast, or skin dimpling
- A breast lump that feels hard or firm, and above all if it is uneven or irregular and not directly under the nipple
- Any lump which is enlarging
- Lumps in the armpit

Treatment for Gynecomastia

This has few physical problems and usually does not need any treatment.

- It does not increase the risk for breast cancer.
- If an underlying condition or disease is found, it will be treated.
- If caused by medicine, your provider will look at the benefits of the medicine and may make some changes.
- If caused by lack of testosterone and increase in estrogen, hormonal treatment may be prescribed.
- Surgery may be a choice for some men if other treatments have not worked.

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