

Gynecomastia (male breasts)

As if puberty is not hard enough on guys. Going through all the different changes. Your voice changes, you grow facial hair and then it seems as though you might be growing breasts. What's going on?

What is gynecomastia?

Gynecomastia (or gynaecomastia) is the medical term for breast tissue growing on a male. While it is not known exactly why it happens, it is actually normal for young men, and about 65% of 14 year old males develop some breast tissue. The hormones that cause all of the other changes in puberty can cause this too.

Breast tissue growth for older males can be caused by other health problems, or by medicines that are needed to treat some health problems, or by use of some drugs such as anabolic steroids. This is different to the normal growth of breast tissue in young men around puberty. Men who are overweight can develop 'man boobs', but this is caused by fat deposits, not breast tissue growth.

What does it look like?

It normally looks like a slight swelling under the nipples. One breast may develop on its own, or both may grow a little. Sometimes it can be tender or itchy.

It starts like breast development does for girls, but it stops when it is still a small lump. It does not keep growing.

Even though it might seem very obvious to you, most other people will not notice it. It should be hardly noticeable under your clothes. If you are worried about how it looks when you take your top off, for example when you go swimming, wear a t-shirt. This will protect other parts of your body from getting sun burnt too, which is always good!

How long will it last?

This form of Gynecomastia is always temporary. The swelling should go down within a year or two, and it is virtually always gone before the age of 20 years.

Should I see a doctor?

It would be best for anyone who has a concern about his health to talk to someone about it. A doctor can examine you and make sure that there is no other reason for the growth of the breast tissue. It is rare that any tests will be needed.

Your doctor will be able to answer any other questions you may also have.

Note: This topic gives some practical suggestions and information about health issues. It is important to see your doctor or health professional for information specific to a health concern you may have about yourself.

References

American Academy of Family Physicians. 'Gynecomastia: When Breasts form in Males.' (cited 28/8/06)

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