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Gynecomastia: When Breasts Form in Males

What is gynecomastia?

Gynecomastia is a condition in which firm breast tissue forms in males. The breast tissue is usually less than 1-1/2 inches across and is located directly under the nipple. Gynecomastia may be present on one side or on both sides. This condition may make the breast tender.

Some men and boys have fat on their chests that makes it look like they have breasts. This condition is called pseudogynecomastia (false gynecomastia). It is not the same thing as gynecomastia.

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What causes gynecomastia?

Gynecomastia is usually caused by changes in hormones at puberty or as part of aging. Gynecomastia may be caused by changes in the balance of 2 hormones: estrogen and testosterone. In rare cases, gynecomastia may be caused by prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, illegal drugs, tumors or disease.

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Are tests needed to find the cause of gynecomastia?

Sometimes tests are needed, and sometimes they're not. Your doctor will ask you questions about your symptoms, such as how long you've had the breast tissue, and whether or not the area is tender. Your doctor will also ask you about any illnesses you may have had in the past, medicines you take, and other matters relating to your health. Then you will have a physical examination.

Whether you need tests depends on your age and what your doctor learns from your history and physical examination. Gynecomastia is common in teenage boys. As many as 65% of 14-year-old boys have gynecomastia. If you are a teenager, you probably will not need tests. Your breast enlargement will probably go away on its own in 2 or 3 years. However, younger boys and adult men who have gynecomastia may need to have some tests. In these cases, it is possible that some kind of

disease may be causing the problem.

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How is gynecomastia treated?

In most cases, no treatment is needed. Your doctor will probably want to check the size of your breast tissue every few months. In 90% of teenage boys, gynecomastia goes away in less than 3 years.

Sometimes the problem can be solved if you stop taking a medicine that is causing gynecomastia or stop using an illegal drug that is causing the problem.

Occasionally, medicines may be used to treat gynecomastia, especially if tenderness is a problem. The medicine will make the extra breast tissue go away. Rarely, surgery may be necessary to remove the extra breast tissue.

If gynecomastia is caused by a disease or a tumor, treatment is necessary. If gynecomastia is caused by a disease, the disease itself will need to be treated.

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Could the breast lump be cancer?

Probably not. Breast cancer is very rare in males. Lumps caused by cancer are usually not underneath the nipple--where breast tissue from gynecomastia grows. Breast cancer feels different than the breast tissue of gynecomastia. Breast cancer may also cause dimpling of the skin or a bloody discharge from the nipple. Your doctor will probably be able to tell whether your breast lump is cancer. If there is any question that you have cancer, you will need to have a mammogram and a biopsy.

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Other Organizations

Revolution Health Men's Community

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