

Gynecomastia

Gynecomastia means enlargement of the tissue in the male breast. It is the most common reason men are seen for diagnostic breast imaging. Adolescent boys and men most often report a lump in the breast. They may also have breast swelling or pain. This may only be noticed in one breast. However, testing usually shows growth in both breasts. It is important for men to tell their doctor about new breast symptoms even if it is difficult or embarrassing.

Gynecomastia occurs when there is a hormonal imbalance in the body. This is normal in growing infants and teen boys when hormonal changes are common. These changes often go away within 6 months to 2 years when hormone levels are balanced.

Men can develop lumps in the breast and have breast pain. The cause of the lumps and pain is often different than for women. Breast cancer can occur in men but it is not the most common cause of new breast symptoms.

Beyond the normal hormonal imbalance discussed above, there are a number of medical causes of gynecomastia including:

- Decreased testosterone production by the testes (male sex organs) due to either a genetic or acquired disorder. Acquired disorders include trauma to the testes, infection, reduced blood flow, and aging.
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Chronic renal failure
- Hyperthyroidism
- Some tumors involving the testes, adrenal glands or pituitary gland

Some medicines may also cause gynecomastia. Such as:

- Medicines used to treat prostate enlargement and prostate cancer
- Some high blood pressure medicines
- Anabolic steroids and androgens
- Some HIV medicines
- Anti-anxiety medicines
- Tricyclic antidepressants
- Some antibiotics
- Ulcer medicines
- Chemotherapy
- Heart medicines
- Street drugs (including marijuana, amphetamines, heroin, and methadone)
- Alcohol

All male patients with new breast symptoms including a lump, breast pain, tenderness, or swelling should see their doctor and be referred for testing. The testing includes a mammogram of both breasts and a breast ultrasound of the area where the symptoms are found.

After a diagnosis of gynecomastia is made, all patients should follow up with their doctor to review the possible causes. This may involve blood work to evaluate hormone levels. If the cause is found and addressed gynecomastia may resolve. If the cause is not found and the symptoms are severe, there may be a need to see a breast surgeon. Surgery may be needed to help improve the symptoms.

If you have any other questions or concerns, please call your doctor.

References can be found at Bronson Breast Health Imaging.