

Gynecomastia

Gynecomastia is the enlargement of male breast tissue. It is a common, benign condition for adolescent males and men over the age of 50.

■ What is it?

Gynecomastia is the most common reason male patients present to a breast imaging office. It is a benign (non-cancerous) condition in which normal breast tissue behind the nipple grows and enlarges. It can occur at any age, although most cases are seen in adolescence and over the age of 50. The most common symptoms include a palpable mass or lump behind the nipple, breast pain, and/or nipple sensitivity. Either a single breast or both breasts can be affected. Skin changes (e.g. dimpling or redness) and nipple discharge are not typically associated with gynecomastia.

■ Causes

All men have a small amount of breast tissue behind the nipple which, under a microscope, is similar to milk-producing tissue in the female breast. This tissue is very sensitive to hormonal influences, and gynecomastia can often be traced to alterations in hormone balance. For example, adolescent men can have higher levels of estradiol/estrogen, while older men can have lower levels of testosterone. Medications have also been associated with gynecomastia including drugs to treat high blood pressure, an enlarged prostate, or psychiatric conditions. Rarely, it can be associated with testicular, liver or kidney disease. In some cases, there is no known cause.

■ Diagnosis and Imaging

Most cases of gynecomastia are diagnosed by a combination of physical exam and mammography. Ultrasound is used in select cases, but it is typically not the first test of choice in those over the age of 24. In rare cases, a biopsy may be needed to make the diagnosis.

■ Treatment and Follow Up

You should follow up with your referring physician for management. Usually gynecomastia will resolve on its own. However, it may be useful to review potentially contributory medications with your prescribing physician. In rare cases where symptoms are severe, it can be removed surgically.

There is no need to follow gynecomastia with future mammograms or ultrasounds. However, it is very important to immediately report any worsening symptoms to your doctor, including breast enlargement, worsening pain, skin changes, or nipple discharge. Such symptoms may warrant repeat imaging at a breast imaging center.



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