



Gynecomastia: Evaluation, Management, and Guidelines for Referral



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What is gynecomastia?

Gynecomastia is defined as an abnormal growth of breast tissue in males. It is usually caused by an imbalance of estrogen and testosterone. Boys going through puberty can develop temporary gynecomastia as a result of normal changes in hormone levels. Physiologic gynecomastia is a common condition with an overall incidence of 35 percent in males 10-16 years of age, increasing to 65 percent at age 14 and dropping to 15 percent in 16-year-old boys. Pubertal gynecomastia often regresses on its own: 75 percent of cases resolve within two years of onset and 90 percent resolve within three years. Infrequently, gynecomastia can be caused by an underlying health condition (pathological gynecomastia). Causes for pathological gynecomastia can be correlated to medications, diseases related to endocrine abnormalities, tumors, chronic disease, chromosomal disorders and miscellaneous other conditions.

Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of gynecomastia may include:

- Swollen breast gland tissue
- Breast tenderness
- Nipple discharge
- Swollen nipples (especially in adolescent boys)
- Psychological or emotional concerns

Causes

Several things can upset the balance of testosterone and estrogen, leading to gynecomastia, including:

- Natural hormone changes
- Medications
- Illicit drug use (marijuana)
- Certain health conditions
 - Hypogonadism, Klinefelter's syndrome, pituitary insufficiency, tumors (testes, adrenal glands, pituitary), hyperthyroidism, kidney failure, liver failure

Treatment

In cases of pathological gynecomastia, underlying conditions require treatment. In these cases, the patient should be seen and treated by an endocrinologist.

In adolescents with physiologic gynecomastia, depending on how long the breast enlargement has been present, re-evaluations may be recommended at 6-12 month intervals to see if the condition improves on its own. In 90 percent of teenage boys, gynecomastia goes away without treatment in two to three years. Surgical treatment may be considered if gynecomastia does not improve on its own.

When to Refer to Nationwide Children's Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

If the patient you are referring has new onset of gynecomastia (i.e., young adolescence – 12-13 years old), it would be helpful to educate the family about the natural behavior of the breast growth and to follow them annually to observe for spontaneous regression.

If the breast growth is thought to be related to obesity, consider weight loss options prior to a referral. Nationwide Children's Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition can help provide an effective diet and exercise program. To make a referral, call (614) 722-4824.

Patients should be referred for consideration of surgical intervention if the gynecomastia is severe or has not resolved by late adolescence.

What to Expect at a Consultation

- A detailed history will be obtained to include past significant medical history, medications (past and current), to determine the timeline of the presence of enlargement of breast tissue, to identify any illicit drug use that could have contributed to growth of breast tissue, and to uncover any concern for a pathologic cause for gynecomastia.
- A breast exam will be performed.
- Initial blood tests to determine the cause of gynecomastia, if not completed prior to the consultation, will be ordered. If any of the labs are out of normal range, a referral will likely be made to a specialist to better determine what additional testing needs to be done to investigate.
- Photographs will be obtained if it is determined that surgical intervention is indicated.
- During the consultation, a practitioner will determine if the patient is ready to proceed with surgical intervention. There are many factors that can delay surgical intervention, such as the patient's weight management, pubertal growth, and/or mental state.
- Even if a patient is deemed a good candidate during consultation, prior authorization will need to be obtained through their insurance company. This can be a lengthy process and authorization is not always approved.

To Make a Referral

In the Section of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Nationwide Children's, a multidisciplinary team of experts provides comprehensive care for all pediatric plastic surgical problems. To confer with a specialist, please call the Physician Direct Connect line at (614) 355-0221 or (877) 355-0221.

To refer a patient, please call (614) 722-6299.

Referrals and Consultations

Online: [NationwideChildrens.org/Plastic-Surgery](https://www.NationwideChildrens.org/Plastic-Surgery)

Phone: (614) 722-6200 or (877) 722-6299 | Fax: (614) 722-4000

Physician Direct Connect Line for 24-hour urgent physician consultations:
(614) 355-0221 or (877) 355-0221.

