

Gynecomastia has psychological impact on adolescent boys

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Persistent breast enlargement (gynecomastia) negatively affects self-esteem and other areas of mental and emotional health in adolescent males, reports the April issue of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, the official medical journal of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS).

Even mild gynecomastia can have adverse psychological effects in [boys](#), according to the study by ASPS Member Surgeon Dr. Brian I. Labow and colleagues of Boston Children's Hospital. They believe their findings have important implications for early intervention and treatment, including male breast reduction in appropriate cases.

Study Shows Psychological Impact of Gynecomastia in Boys

The researchers administered a series of psychological tests to 47 healthy boys, average age 16.5 years, being evaluated for gynecomastia. The results were compared to those of a group of boys without breast enlargement.

Sixty-two percent of the gynecomastia patients had mild to moderate breast enlargement. As in previous studies, many of the boys with gynecomastia were overweight or obese: 64 percent, compared to 41 percent of the comparison group.

Patients with gynecomastia had lower scores on a standard quality of life assessment, indicating problems in several areas. Even after adjustment for weight and [body mass index](#) (BMI), the patients had lower scores for general health, social functioning and mental health. They also had lower scores for [physical health](#), but this was attributed to being overweight.

Breast enlargement was also associated with lower scores for self-esteem. This, along with impairment in emotional areas of quality of life, appeared directly related to gynecomastia, rather than being overweight.

Boys with gynecomastia also scored higher on a test of attitudes toward food and eating. However, there was no difference in the rate of clinical eating disorders between groups.

Psychosocial Effects Independent of Gynecomastia Severity

The negative psychological effects of gynecomastia were similar for boys at different levels of severity. "Merely having gynecomastia was sufficient to cause significant deficits in general health, social functioning, mental health, self-esteem, and eating behaviors and attitudes compared with controls," Dr. Labow and coauthors write.

Gynecomastia is benign enlargement of male glandular tissue that is very common in adolescent boys. Although breast enlargement usually resolves over time, the problem persists in about eight percent of boys. Typically, boys with gynecomastia who are overweight or obese may simply be advised to lose weight.

However, losing weight won't correct the problem in patients who have true glandular enlargement, or in those with a large amount of excess

skin in the breast area. As shown by the new study, patients with gynecomastia may experience emotional and self-esteem issues regardless of body weight or the severity of breast enlargement.

"As a result, early intervention and treatment for gynecomastia may be necessary to improve the negative physical and emotional symptoms," Dr. Labow and coauthors state. They note that male breast reduction, performed by a qualified plastic surgeon, is typically a simple and safe procedure.

It may seem self-evident that breast enlargement could have a psychological and emotional impact on teenage boys. However, adolescent gynecomastia has historically been regarded as a "cosmetic" procedure, not reimbursed by most insurance plans. The researchers note that only 35 percent of adolescent boys undergoing surgery for gynecomastia at their hospital were covered by insurance, compared to 85 percent of girls undergoing breast reduction.

"Our results indicate that careful and regular evaluation for gynecomastia may benefit adolescents regardless of BMI status or severity of gynecomastia," Dr. Labow and colleagues conclude. They call for further studies to evaluate the effects of male [breast reduction](#), including its impact on physical and psychological symptoms.

Provided by Wolters Kluwer Health

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