

Man boobs: Causes and prevention

Man boobs are caused by the formation of excess fat or breast tissue, which gives the appearance of breasts. For sufferers, it can be an extremely embarrassing issue, leading to problems with self-esteem, body confidence and an overall decline in mental wellbeing.

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It is not uncommon to find a boy or a man with breasts. For men, it could be a balance with body mass, much for the obese. In an email, Martin O, who was not happy sharing his full name, wrote to this newspaper, asking Dr Vincent Karuhanga the cause of his big breasts and whether there was a cure.

"I have had them since I was 11 years old. I was told they would eventually disappear, but this has not happened. I am now 20 years old and I still fear looking at my reflection in the mirror. What can I do?" he questioned.

Dr Karuhanga said: "Breast prominence can result from increase in breast tissue, chest skin, fat tissue or a combination of the three. Today, many boys have big breasts because of obesity, with excessive fat in the breast area (pseudogynaecomastia).

Dr Dennis Buwembo, a public health expert, says the development or growth of breasts in men is medically called gynaecomastia. "Usually, it is either true breast glandular tissue development known as gynaecomastia or false breast development - proliferation of fatty tissues surrounding the breast gland known as pseudogynaecomastia," he explains.

Causes

The causes include gonadal (testes) failure, which Dr Buwembo explains as primarily - mumps, castration or secondary to some disease - leading to failure to secrete androgens.

"The receptors for androgens may become defective or be blocked by certain drugs such as some anti-ulcer drugs, blood pressure, some antibiotics and some cancer remedies," he says.

The public health expert adds that



over production of oestrogen, the hormone responsible for breast development in females, by a tumour also contributes to growth of breasts in men.

"In most cases, extragonadal conversion of androgens to oestrogen as occurs in obese individuals, or diseases elsewhere such as the liver, thyroid, and adrenal gland. Dr Karuhanga explains that the case in female hormones (Oestrogens) lead to development of breast tissue and male ones (testosterone) suppresses this.

Age

Elderly men could develop breasts because experts say male hormones reduce as someone grows older. Another cause is castration and obesity where fat changes male to female hormones and with an increase in female hormones, breast development inevitably occurs.

"In adolescence, gynaecomastia is common and may affect one breast which may even be painful. It usually disappears on its own within one to two years."

Obesity

Dr Buwembo emphasises obesity as a major cause of breast development in men, especially now when most men turn to junk food and eat oily foods. Malnutrition and starvation is also listed as a cause because it leads to a drop in testosterone levels, thereby causing hormonal imbalance.

Prevention

Dr Dennis Buwembo, a public health expert, says one will get a solution depending on what is causing the man boobs.

Firstly, there is breast growth that comes with age (neonates, puberty and old age). Dr Buwembo says there is nothing much you can do about this.

He adds that in cases where development of breasts is induced by one taking a given drug for another ailment - the drug can be stopped.

Dr Buwembo implores men with breasts to seek medical attention because some underlying causes might be the cause and therefore the need for early treatment.

"These conditions need to be ruled out by thorough history taking and examination," he adds.

Statistics

A study published in an Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism states that 30 per cent of men grow a set of man boobs at some point in their life.

They linked the causes of man boobs to the hormone testosterone compared to oestrogen, natural hormone changes, aging and also adds liver failure and cirrhosis which is linked to hormonal instability.

Sometimes the growth of man boobs is an indication of an underlying disease such as liver failure and cirrhosis, which is linked to hormonal instability. Therefore tests should be carried out to eliminate these.

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