

HEALTH MATTERS: Former NFL player suffered with gynecomastia for years

September 1, 2016 | Written by: Marie Y. Lemelle, Contributing Columnist



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When you are a 240-pound linebacker in the NFL, the last thing you want to worry about is “how do I look in a shirt?”

For years, Zac Diles played in the NFL, but once the shoulder pads came off, it was apparent that he had more on his chest than muscle. Diles has a condition called gynecomastia, which is derived from the Greek words gyne meaning “woman” and mastos meaning “breast.”

While it is a condition, not a disease or something to be ashamed of, the appearance of what is often referred by the derogatory term “man breasts or boobs” can be unpleasant, embarrassing, humiliating and the object of body shaming.

“It affected my life a great deal, to the point that I wouldn’t wear certain clothes,” said Diles, who has retired from football. “It was an uncomfortable feeling to think people were staring at my chest because my nipples would always poke out through my shirt.”

Diles said friends would tease him but it wasn’t too big of an issue or in a devastating manner. Many males afflicted with the condition cite the number one reason for seeking surgery was to stop the bullying and name-calling.

“While teenagers are bullied by their peers and victims of excess breast tissue, so are incredibly fit men who work out constantly and can’t rid their bodies of this condition through exercise or drugs,” said Dr. Babak Dadvand, a double board-certified plastic surgeon and gynecomastia expert, who has performed the gynecomastia procedure on a young patient at the onset of puberty, with the families’ consent, and on people as old as 65.

“My oldest patient said he wished he had been aware of the option years ago and can now enjoy life to the fullest,” Dadvand said.

The fact is the condition is more common than most people realize, affecting nearly 60 percent of 14-year-old boys during puberty, an estimated 36 percent to 47 percent of American men between the ages of 24 to 45 and 55 percent to 60 percent of men aged 50 or older.

The presence of extra breast tissue is not widely known as a medical condition. Most people, even medical professionals, have no idea about the cause.

It is believed by most to be the result of obesity, or “baby fat” that will evidentially resolve itself. Some studies may point to smoking marijuana, consuming excessive amounts of alcohol, steroid abuse or various types of pharmaceutical drugs such as Risperdal, ACE-inhibitors and other side effects from medication.

As more men began discovering there is a solution to eliminate the problem, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons reports that 27,456 breast reduction surgeries (gynecomastia) performed on men, represent a 5 percent increase over the previous year and a 35 percent growth since 2000. The procedure performed for cosmetic and psychosocial reasons has become the fourth most common surgery among men.

Signs of Gynecomastia

Chest soreness

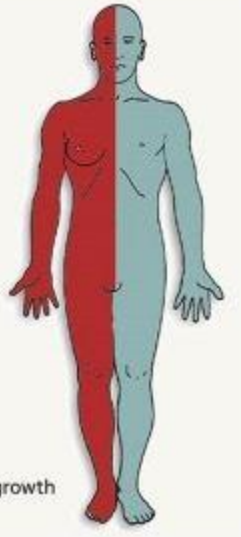
Swelling of chest tissue

Breast enlargement

Increase in nipple size

Nipple discharge

Symmetrical or asymmetrical breast growth



The stigma of men with unwanted large breasts can cause self-image problems and be emotionally damaging.

Source: Risperdal

“I was around 15 when I first noticed the change in my body,” Diles said. “At 14, I hit a growth spurt. My height shot up from 5-7 to 6 feet within two months. I just thought that was the reason why my chest didn’t keep up the pace with the rest of my body.”

No other males in his family were affected.

“I had nothing to reference, to pinpoint that I had a medical condition,” he said. “I know I didn’t like the puffy look.”

Diles recalls that every time he was at the pool, the gym, in the locker room, or doing outdoor activities, he would, at the very least always wear a tank top to keep his chest covered.

“I would still add another layer of camouflage by draping a towel around my neck so the ends would hang over my nipples,” he said.

As with most men unaware of the condition, they work out extra hard to reduce the enlargement.



A large majority of men have some form of gynecomastia – light, mild, or heavy. The photo illustrates a light case of gynecomastia. Since the condition is typically non-life-threatening, even a heavy case of the gynecomastia has prompted some men to elect to not get the surgery and to wear a bra, which does not define their sexuality but rather supports their excessive breast tissue.

Source: Dr. Babak Davvand

“I worked out every day,” he said. “My body overall was in the best shape, but my chest never changed.”

Diles says his saving grace was when the temperature turned cold. In chilly weather my nipples stayed contracted.

It was during his first year of retirement from the NFL that he decided to do something about his appearance. Diles found out about gynecomastia on the Internet.

After in-depth research, he concluded that the only option to permanently get rid of the excess tissue was surgery.

“I was fortunate to discover Dr. Davvand,” said Diles. “My experience with Dr. Davvand was top notch. The pain was minimal and not only was my problem fixed, it looks like it never happened, which is phenomenal.”



Performing more than 4,000 male breast reduction procedures, Dr. Babak Dadvand, the medical director at Beverly Hospital and Olympia Medical Center and Chief of Surgery in Los Angeles, CA has made gynecomastia a niche among his arsenal of plastic surgery options. Source: drdadvandplasticsurgery.com

At 29 years old, with the support of family and friends, Dalia underwent surgery performed by Dr. Dadvand to flatten his puffy nipples and for the first time in his life he has a natural looking chest.

“I’m now able to wear the clothes I was always scared to put on,” Diles said. “It’s opened up so much more confidence and that to me is priceless.”

Sept. 1 marks the end of summer and Diles’ breast-reduction surgery ended his days of covering up his physique and enjoying what summer is all about.

Currently, he is a successful high-end real estate agent serving clients in the NFL, including the Southland’s newest residents — team members of the Los Angeles Rams.

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