

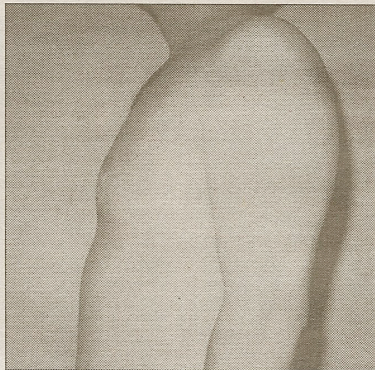
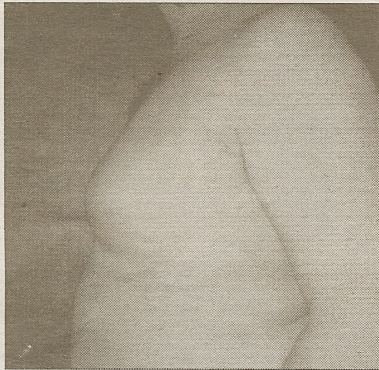
# It lifts: They're not just for women

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**POLAROID IMAGES** of Merle Yost, before (left) and after surgery.

Obviously, the notion that "bigger is better" doesn't hold true for men with bouncy breasts. But men don't necessarily want to go too small, either. Getting a man's chest just right to bare with pride at the beach or in the locker room turns out to be a tricky business.

The perfect male breast will have some definition, explains Dr. Miguel Delgado, a San Francisco plastic surgeon. "Ideally, a man's breast above the areola is full," he said. "It will have some small contour and as you come down to the areola it comes down to an actual fold and starts flattening towards the chest, which is perfectly flat."

In other words, something akin to famously chiseled actor Brad Pitt's buff and oft-exposed pectorals in the movie "Fight Club."

To correct the "wall with two bullet holes" look, many men have sought pectoral implants to give their breasts the ideal, contoured look. But far more frequent are reductions of so-called "man boobs."

Last year, 13,963 men had breast reductions, making the procedure the fifth most common plastic surgery for males, behind nose jobs, liposuction, hair transplants and eyelid surgery. Many of those men also had their "silver dollars reduced to quarters" in nipple-reduction surgeries.

Not surprisingly, there's a medical term for the large breast affliction: gynecomastia, defined by "Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary" as excessive development

of the male breasts. The word derives from the Greek word for "women-like breasts."

Fat tissue typically increases in the breasts of overweight men, but chests can also swell in physically fit men. For men who suffer from the condition, breasts usually grow abnormally large at the onset of puberty when the body produces large amounts of testosterone.

The liver then converts the excess hormone into estrogen, which causes growth of breast tissue. A similar hormonal imbalance occurs with men who abuse anabolic steroids.

But insurance companies don't consider gynecomastia a genuine illness. Rarely will a policy cover male breast reductions. Doctors say that insurers deem the surgery purely cosmetic.

Men who have surgically decreased the size of their breasts say the procedure has improved their self-confidence. Some suggest that it lifted them from depression caused by their embarrassing physical appearance.

Delgado, who performs 80 to 90 breast reductions a year, says the issue remained taboo for many sufferers.

"Men do not talk about it like women, who like to talk about this and that or 'I got my lips done,'" Delgado said. "This is so embarrassing for men. It's a feminizing thing that men cannot stand to talk about."

For Yost, who administers the Web site gynecomastia.org and

**"I did many things to disguise it. I was quite famous for wearing a lot of Hawaiian shirts, big floppy Hawaiian shirts during the disco era. I was a nerd."**

Merle Yost

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counsels male patients with enlarged breasts, the surgery was unsuccessful. His oversized breasts returned in the years following his surgery.

"It's just impossible to get rid of all that breast tissue," he says. "It grows aggressively." Although, he adds, "There are a lot of flat-chested women who might disagree with that."

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