



For many cases of man boobs, the solution is in the gym.

# The Cure for Man Boobs

**Gynecomastia is incredibly embarrassing and shockingly common. But it is treatable. Your flat-chest plan is here.** By Lou Schuler

With his shaved head, lean torso, and broad shoulders, Kevin Larrabee, c.s.c.s., looks like a lot of fitness professionals. At his job at Mike Boyle Strength & Conditioning in Boston, the 30-year-old fits right in with the crowd. But back when he was a teenager, Larrabee stood out for the wrong reasons. For one thing, he was overweight at 210 pounds. And he had another problem: man boobs.

“I just thought I had the chest of a fat kid,” says Larrabee. So at age 15, he decided to lose the excess poundage. He ditched the junk food and embraced a healthier, lower-calorie diet. He exercised “a ridiculous amount.” In three months he dropped to 175 pounds. But somehow he still had those womanly breasts.

What Larrabee didn’t know was that his condition, gynecomastia—known colloquially as man boobs, mannary glands, or, if you’re espe-

cially unkind, chesticles—was caused by breast tissue, an artifact of the hormonal big bang that hits all boys at puberty. He also didn’t know that 50 percent of his peers had developed gynecomastia as well but that in most of them it later receded to unnoticeable levels.

“I knew it wasn’t right, but there wasn’t anything I could do about it other than try to lose more weight,” he remembers. “I was as far as I could get with the knowledge I had.”

**Your body is not always a perfect regulator of your hormones,** says Adrian Lo, M.D., a plastic surgeon based in Philadelphia who specializes in gynecomastia. In fact, out-of-whack hormones are what cause the formation of excess tissue in the first place: Your testicles produce both estrogen and testosterone, but in early puberty you may not have enough free testos-

terone (the hormone that builds muscle) to counteract the estrogen. That imbalance allows glandular tissue to form. “In puberty, many boys have ‘breast buds,’” Dr. Lo explains. “Usually that tissue shrinks to nothing as they grow out of puberty.” For a few, however, it remains. And men can grow breasts in other ways; in fact, as many as 60 percent develop them at some point in their lives. Some are guys with pubescent gynecomastia that never went away, while others develop man boobs because of medications (see “The Breast Medicines” on the next page). Then there are the men carrying excess body fat that enlarges their breast tissue, creating the dreaded condition.

A guy with a bosom born of chest fat instead of tissue has a condition known as pseudo-gynecomastia. This is the type often seen in overweight men, whose moobs can resemble anything from the perky proto-breasts of your middle-school girlfriend to those deflated *National Geographic* specimens. Working out or losing weight may help those disappear.

With true gynecomastia, as Kevin Larrabee learned, no amount of exercise or diet vigilance will help. “Once you have it, you have it,” Dr. Lo

## The Breast Medicines

Up to 25 percent of gynecomastia cases are caused by drugs like these, according to the journal *American Family Physician*.

### Anabolic steroids

### Antidepressants

Paroxetine (e.g., Paxil), fluoxetine (Prozac)

### Antipsychotics

Risperidone (Risperdal)

### Cholesterol drugs

Atorvastatin (Lipitor)

### Hair-loss treatments

Finasteride, minoxidil

### Heartburn remedies

Cimetidine (Tagamet)

### Ulcer drugs

Ranitidine (Zantac)

### ACE inhibitors

Larrabee was bothered. All through his teen years, he would try to cover up his chest with creatively layered T-shirts and sports jerseys. Earnings from his part-time jobs were spent on spot-reducing creams and sprays. "I wasted hundreds of dollars on that stuff," he says. In the gym, he built his workouts around chest exercises. He avoided any situation where he might be expected to take off his shirt. But despite his best efforts, people noticed.

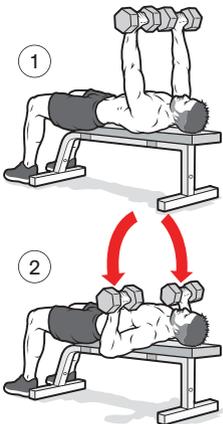
Finally, in college, Larrabee googled "fat chest" and learned that surgery was his only option. After pleading with his parents to help pay for it, he had the operation in 2007, during his Christmas break. The first time he saw his new chest was an emotional moment. He compares the experience to looking in the mirror and seeing a different face staring back. "It was unbelievable," he says. "I had a flat chest! I couldn't wait for summer."

Like cosmetic breast implants, gynecomastia surgery is rarely covered by insurance. It costs anywhere from \$5,000 to \$8,000. But for Larrabee, it was a bargain. "At the end of the day," he says, "it was a miracle that worked."

says. "The only way to take care of it is surgery." He performs four or five of those procedures a week. "The men I see are usually pretty fit," he says. "But most men with gynecomastia qualify for surgery even if they're not an ideal weight." A sliver of breast tissue the size of a silver dollar can be enough to make the areola soft and puffy. Then the man needs to decide whether it bothers him enough to do something about it.

## The Best Chest Move

If you're trying to shrink breast fat and sculpt your pecs, make the **dumbbell bench press** your go-to move. Here's how to do it: Lie on a bench holding a pair of dumbbells with your arms straight above your chest, palms facing forward. Lower the dumbbells to the sides of your chest, pause, and then push them back up to the starting position. That's 1 rep.



## Flatten Your Front

This 4-step plan may help you downsize your man boobs.

### 1/ Trim Some Calories

Eating less can help you lose man-boob fat, but don't go overboard. A very low-calorie diet is bad for many reasons; for one thing, starvation wreaks havoc on your hormones. That may actually increase your risk of gynecomastia when you start eating again. "Cut 250 to 500 calories a day. Eat plenty of protein, fruits, and vegetables," says *Men's Health* nutrition advisor Mike Roussell, Ph.D.

### 2/ Straighten Your Posture

Rounded shoulders make a soft chest look even softer. Rehab specialist Dean Somerset, C.S.C.S., recommends the band pull-apart to draw your shoulders back into their natural posture. Hold an exercise band straight out in front of you with your arms shoulder-width apart. Pull your arms out to your sides while lifting your sternum and pulling your shoulder blades down and together. Do 3 or 4 sets of 10 to 12 reps every day—especially after sitting.

### 3/ Ease Up on the Partying

Both marijuana and alcohol have been linked to gynecomastia, due to the testosterone-lowering effect of heavy use. But it all comes down to the genetic luck of the draw. "Everyone's sensitivity level is different," Dr. Lo says. "Some people can smoke pot forever and not get gynecomastia. Others smoke one joint and their breasts will swell up and get tender."

### 4/ Bench-Press It Away

The fat that causes pseudogynecomastia tends to accumulate on the whole breast. (Actual gynecomastia is just behind the nipple.) Sculpting your pecs can cut chest flab. So do dumbbell bench presses (see instructions at left) two days a week. "Don't even count the reps; just think about making your chest as full as possible," advises Kansas City trainer Ethan Benda. Do 5 sets, using a weight you can lift about 20 times. Extra credit: Follow with 3 sets of cable flies, keeping the reps controlled. Finish with 3 sets of heavy barbell bench presses, using a weight you can lift 4 times.