

Obese teenagers seek liposuction

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Surgeons in Australia report that the increase in obesity levels among children and teenagers is resulting in a surge in demand for liposuction. Warning that liposuction is not a weight loss method, the doctors say that these children need to alter their lifestyle and lose weight, prior to contemplating liposuction.

{mosgoogle} Doctors also report that many teenage boys are presenting with the symptoms of gynecomastia, or man boobs, and are seeking liposuction to avoid embarrassment and improve their self-esteem.

Dr Mario Marzola of the Norwood Day Surgery Clinic in Adelaide said that some parents were at their "wit's end", but that many procedures were not suitable for children and teenagers. While recognising the frustration of many parents, he recently refused to perform a liposuction procedure on a 10 year old girl.

Dr Marzola also spoke of boys as young as 14 presenting with man boobs, or gynecomastia, seeking an excision procedure.

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"For boys, breast development at an early age is quite embarrassing," Dr Marzola said.

"That can be addressed early on, rather than let them go on like that for too many years.

A spokesman for the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons Adelaide, Dr Rod Cooter, attributed much of the increase in demand among young people to increasingly prevalent media images of celebrities who have undergone cosmetic surgery procedures to improve their appearance. He said that surgery was not necessarily appropriate for overweight or obese teenagers, adding that they should try to address their weight problem first.

"You have to deal with the primary cause of the problem," Dr Cooter said.

"We are getting a lot more requests for surgery for young people, and we are refusing to do it in some cases. Some of the expectations are unrealistic, some think they can go out and eat whatever they like, and we'll fix it."

Dr Cooter said that breast reduction surgery would be performed on teenage men, only when they had a weight management plan already in place.

The problem of oversized breasts caused by obesity is not just limited to man boobs in teenage boys. Plastic surgeon Dr Julie Lawrence reports an increase in the number of overweight girls seeking breast reductions, with some girls as young as 17, presenting with cup sizes of EE and G.

"One has to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of a surgical procedure at that age. A lot of it has to do with upper back pain, neck pain, difficulty in sport, and being self-conscious," said Dr Lawrence.

Doctors stress that liposuction or breast reduction procedures will not solve the problem of obesity and were not weight loss procedures. Dr David Walsh, of the Australian Medical Association spokesman Dr David Walsh warned that surgery was the answer to the problem of obesity.

"A breast reduction is not going to change their weight or influence things like blood pressure or diabetes," he said.

As a last resort, though, doctors will consider bariatric surgery and lap banding for those children who have tried to lose weight through diet and exercise and have failed, and whose obesity is such that it presents a general threat to their overall health.

Dr Justin Bessell, of the Adelaide Obesity Centre at Wakefield Hospital, reports an "exponential growth" in the number of patients undergoing bariatric surgery and gastric banding in recent years.