Dear Alice,

I just wanna know what the female breast is made of? Is milk really inside them? I'm just curious as to what gives them their size or shape. I would ask my mom but I'm afraid she'll get mad and won't tell me. I'm a 24 year old guy and I'm just curious that's all. Thanks to anyone who can answer.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Breasts can be rather intriguing so it's no wonder you're curious. To get right to your questions, Reader, the components of the female breasts largely dictate the size and shape of the anatomy in question. They are mostly made of fibrous tissue and fat, with the amount of fat accounting for much of the differences in breast size. As far as shape is concerned, this is due in part because they contain the components necessary to make human milk. Though breasts are largely associated with the female of the human species, males have them too and despite biological sex, there's a lot of variance with each and every one.

Because the function of the female breast has an impact on appearance, it's helpful to know a little bit more about lactation or the production of human milk. Milk production takes place within small round glands in the breast (called lobules) and usually occurs during the late stages of pregnancy (starting around the fifth or sixth month) and just after birth in order to breastfeed. Ducts connect the glands to the nipple, where milk exits the body. Breasts of females who are not pregnant and who have not recently been breastfeeding after giving birth do still contain the glands to produce milk, but do not have milk inside of them. It may interest you to know that the ability to produce milk is not the only change in female breasts resulting from pregnancy. Hormonal changes during pregnancy also cause the dark areas around the nipples (areolas) to grow and the overall breast size to increase.

In both males and females, the fatty tissue that composes the breast lies on top of the chest's pectoralis muscles (or 'pecs') and is protected by a layer of connective tissue called fascia. Even though male breasts may not appear as 'breasts' are often thought of, the structure is there. However, males typically have less tissue and also fewer glands and ducts than females. Almost 60 percent of men over the age of 44 have breast tissue that can be detected by touch. Lactation in human males has only been documented in rare cases.

As with other body parts, breasts vary from person to person. In addition to differences in
shape and size, breasts can occasionally bear certain characteristics like extra breast tissue (polymastia) or extra nipples (polythelia). Sometimes, an individual may have only one breast or no breasts at all (amastia). Though every breast is unique, check out this Mayo Clinic slide show [2] for a visual aid of the female breast anatomy. Hopefully this will help shed some light on what’s actually inside those mysterious female breasts!

Alice!

Category:
General Health [3]
Sexual & Reproductive Health [4]
Pregnancy [5]
Miscellaneous [6]

Related questions

What should I do with her breasts? [7]
Mammogram [8]
Male breast cancer [9]
Fourteen and still boobless [10]

Published date:
Jan 23, 2015
Last reviewed on:
Jan 23, 2015

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/curious-about-female-breast-anatomy#comment-0

Links