

CAN BREAST IMPLANTS CAUSE BREAST CANCER?

LET'S TALK ABOUT A MORE SERIOUS TOPIC THIS MONTH.

You may have recently seen more media coverage trying to scare everyone about breast implants causing breast cancer. If you haven't, you will probably see something in the media within the next year. Before you freak out, read this first.

Is there a connection between breast implants and breast cancer? The simple answer is no.

The complicated answer is that there does appear to be a connection for an extremely rare type of lymphoma in the breast and a certain type of breast implant. This specific cancer, called ALCL (Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma) is a lymphoma that occurs in breast tissue but isn't considered cancer of the breast itself. But it is curable and extremely rare.

There are currently only 186 cases of breast implant related ALCL in the US as of 2017. That's in consideration that there are almost 500,000 implants placed annually in the US alone. So overall the risk of developing ALCL is extremely low.

So what does ALCL look like? The standard situation is swelling in one breast about 8 years after implant placement, either through cosmetic or reconstructive needs. Swelling is usually painless and presents as a pocket of fluid around the implant seen by mammogram, CT scan, or ultrasound.

As of 2017, there have only been 5 US deaths from ALCL, all of which appear to be related to late recognition of the disease and delayed surgical treatment for the disease. Most cases of ALCL are completely curable by surgery alone, without the need for chemotherapy or radiation.



What causes this disease? There is no clear answer. There seems to be some relationship between genetics, time (most cases occur at least 8 years after implant placement), some sort of chronic inflammation or infection, and textured breast implants only. No cases of ALCL have occurred with smooth implants.

So, the big question is: what does all this mean for you? According to current US FDA guidelines, the short answer is...nothing. Overall guidelines for surgeons are to continue placing and managing implants in the same way. No changes in screening are necessary at this time. Business as usual, but with a more cautious eye towards symptoms that may point to ALCL. With such a rare chance to develop ALCL, no changes are recommended for using textured implants, as a direct cause and effect for ALCL is just not clear.

Don't freak out. Breast implants don't cause breast cancer. But if you have questions, or if you have a textured implant and have concerns, talk with your board certified plastic surgeon. We are here to take care of you.



Dr. Derek C. Lou
Board Certified
Plastic Surgeon

"As a board-certified plastic surgeon in Houston, Texas, it is my singular goal to bring the benefits of plastic surgery to those who need it, and contrary to what you may have seen or heard, it can be for almost everyone. At first glance, plastic surgery may seem complicated, confusing, and mysterious. As a conscientious surgeon, my role is to help you understand whatever it is that you may need or want and whatever solutions that the art of plastic surgery may provide from breast augmentation, breast reconstructive surgery, to liposuction—in a way that makes sense and in a language that you understand.

I'm confident that after a visit to my office, you will not need to travel any further. It is the ability to help people feel better about themselves that drew me to a career in plastic surgery. I hope you allow me the opportunity to help you.

Dr. Lou is also a regular contributor to RealSelf.com and is considered an expert in the topics of, Breast Augmentation, Breast Implant Revision, and Breast Reduction."



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