

SYDNEY ONCOPLASTIC SURGERY

Breast Implant Removal

All information in this document is provided only as a reference, and should not be taken as medical advice. All surgical/invasive procedures carry risks. Before proceeding, you should seek a second opinion from an appropriately qualified health practitioner.

Introduction

Breast implants are commonly used for cosmetic augmentation and reconstruction (e.g. after an accident or breast cancer). Typically made of silicone, breast implants usually contain either saline or silicone gel.

The majority of women who have breast implants do not encounter complications with their implants. For the minority who do, medical and even surgical intervention may be required.

Common Problems with Breast Implants

Capsular Contracture: After breast implants are placed, the body naturally forms a layer of scar tissue around the breast implant. This layer is called a **capsule**. On its own, the capsule does not usually cause any problems. However, at times this capsule thickens and/or contracts. This may cause pain, some mechanical breathing difficulty, limitation to arm movement, sensations of tightness, or implant shape deformity. This is known as capsular contracture and if it affects the patient significantly, warrants the removal of both the breast implants and capsules.

Implant rupture: Implants may rupture, leading to the leaking of their content. This may occur from trauma, or just an aging implant that weakens over time. The surgical removal of the ruptured implant, along with the leaked content is appropriate in this circumstance. The surgeon does this by removing the implant and capsule as one intact piece. While the surgeon will endeavour to remove all the leaked content (silicone) in this way, a complete removal of implant content cannot be assured.

BIA-ALCL: Breast Implant Associated – Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma is a type of cancer of the immune system, usually found in the scar tissue and fluid around the implant. The risk of developing BIA-ALCL is low, and it is usually successfully treated by the surgical removal of the implant and surrounding scar tissue. Sometimes, radiotherapy and chemotherapy are also required. Women with implants should keep a lookout for changes to their breast and armpit areas (e.g. swelling, pain, or lumps) and speak to their doctor if symptoms appear. The TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration) does not recommend the removal of breast implants for BIA-ALCL unless there are symptoms of BIA-ALCL.

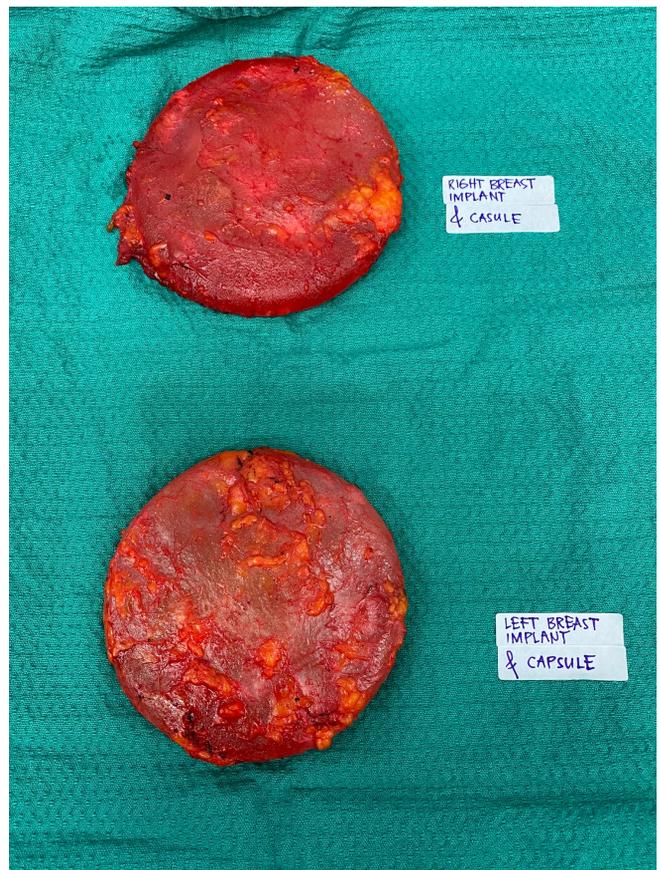
Common Problems with Breast Implants

Breast Implant Illness: Breast Implant Illness (“BII”) is a term used to describe a wide range of symptoms that are reported by some women who have breast implants. These symptoms may include general feeling of being unwell, muscle and joint pain, chronic fatigue, brain fog, anxiety, depression, skin rash, acne, hair loss, and gastrointestinal discomfort. Breast Implant Illness does not affect the majority of women with implants. For the women who are affected, the link between symptoms and the implants is not fully understood and is being studied further. In many of these cases, symptoms of BII improve soon after the implants are removed.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does breast implant removal entail?

Dr Nagy makes an incision at the bottom of the breast, where the breast meets the chest. She then slowly separates the capsule from the chest. Once the entire capsule is detached from the area, it (with the implant inside) is removed through the incision. This way of removing the implant and capsule is commonly referred to as an “en bloc” explant. An “en bloc” removal helps to ensure that the entire content of the implant and capsule are removed from the body, and minimises the risk of any leaked implant content being left in the body.



Picture of both implants removed “en bloc” together with capsules

Frequently Asked Questions

How bad will the surgical scars be?

The scar will run along the crease where the bottom of the breast meets the chest (called the “inframammary fold”). It usually fades over the twelve months after the surgery and is normally hidden under the bra.

Will my breasts look deformed after the implants are removed?

The breast are likely to look the worst immediately after the surgery, but this is temporary. The breasts can look a little deflated, but not deformed. Over time, the skin tends to tighten up and look less loose. Most women who undergo implant removals are satisfied with appearances after six months and feel no need to do more. Some women may explore a breast lift or fat graft to enhance appearances/volume after the implants are removed.

How do I know if I have Breast Implant Illness?

Breast Implant Illness (“BII”) is not a straightforward condition to diagnose. There are no tests to clearly determine if a person is suffering from BII. Symptoms that may suggest BII might actually have other causes. So it is important that those other causes are ruled out prior to concluding that those symptoms are indeed caused by BII. If you think you have BII, your GP may first send you for a series of tests (thyroid function, iron studies, Vit D deficiency, etc) to rule out other possible causes, before coming to a conclusion of BII.

I think I have Breast Implant Illness. How long after surgery will I start seeing improvements to my health?

Relief from symptoms associated with BII depend on the nature of the symptoms themselves. Purely from our observation, symptoms like brain fog, visual distortion or breathing difficulties significantly improve within days of explant. Other symptoms like chronic fatigue, gastrointestinal discomfort, or joint pain usually take weeks/months. Some symptoms, such as food intolerances, bloating or persisting pain, may also require post-surgical care from other medical professionals such as Integrative Medicine Physicians, Endocrinologists, Rheumatologists, or Physiotherapists. There are no guarantees that undergoing the explant will relieve all symptoms; in rare cases some symptoms do not fully improve over time.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long is the surgery?

The duration of the surgery can vary widely and will depend on complexity of surgery needed. For example, if the implant has ruptured or if the capsule is strongly adhered to the chest wall, then this will lead to a greater length of surgery. In most cases, this surgery will take between three to five hours.

How long would I stay in hospital?

Most patients will stay one or two nights in hospital, depending on how quickly they recover from surgery.

How long is my recovery after surgery?

Patients are instructed to avoid physical activities for at least two weeks after surgery, and should expect to resume normal activities after about four to six weeks.

How costly is this treatment?

The total expense that a patient will incur for this treatment will depend largely on two main things: (1) extent of surgery required, and (2) the hospital cover the patient has with a health fund. Complications like ruptured implants increase the complexity and duration of surgery. Hospital cover from a health fund ensures that the cost of the private hospital is paid for by the health fund. Patients without hospital cover through their health fund are not prevented from obtaining treatment. We work closely with patients who are experiencing complications with their implants to help make treatment as accessible as possible.

If I want to have my implants removed, what are the next steps I should take?

A consultation with the Breast Surgeon would be the next step to explore the removal of your implants. We request for patients to obtain a referral from their family doctor to see Dr Nagy. If you suspect that the implants may have ruptured, your GP may organise for an ultrasound of your breasts before you see Dr Nagy. The ultrasound will be useful in planning next steps. To make an appointment to see Dr Nagy, please call the practice at 02 9121 6201.



About Dr Eva Nagy

Dr Nagy is the principal Surgeon at Sydney Oncoplastic Surgery. She treats patients for a range of breast conditions, with a focus on breast cancer. In addition to her offering of surgically removing breast cancer, Dr Nagy is well-equipped with plastic surgical techniques which enable her to provide patients with reconstructive treatment following breast surgery.

While most of her surgical expertise was obtained in Australia, key aspects of her surgical skill set were gained during her Fellowship training at the Nottingham Breast Institute, a world-class Breast Cancer treatment facility in the UK that sees 35,000 patients a year.

Dr Nagy's treatment philosophy is to provide each patient with an unparalleled level of care, ensuring patients are thoroughly informed of their condition and treatment choices. She prides herself on employing her surgical expertise uncompromisingly to deliver the best treatment possible to the patient.

Dr Nagy treats patients at North Shore Private Hospital, Mater Hospital, St Vincent's Private Hospital, and Gosford Private Hospital. She sees patients in her consulting rooms in Sydney's Lower North Shore and North Gosford.