

Breast implants and BIA-ALCL

What you need to know about breast implant-associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma

In short: BIA-ALCL is a rare type of lymphoma (a cancer of the immune system) that can develop in the fluid or scar tissue around a breast implant, mostly textured implants. It usually shows as swelling of one breast many years after surgery. Found early, most cases are cured by removing the implant and the capsule around it.

WHAT IS BIA-ALCL?

Your body forms a thin layer of scar tissue, called the capsule, around every breast implant. In BIA-ALCL, abnormal immune cells grow in the fluid or capsule around the implant. It is **not breast cancer**: it does not start in the breast tissue itself.

HOW COMMON IS IT?

CONFIRMED AUSTRALIAN CASES

150 (NSW Health, 2025)

ESTIMATED RISK

About 1 in 1,800 to 1 in 18,000, depending on the implant type

SMOOTH IMPLANTS

No confirmed Australian case has involved a smooth (Grade 1) implant

WHEN IT APPEARS

Usually 3 to 14 years after surgery, on average about 8 years

The risk is linked to the **texture of the implant surface**, not whether the implant is filled with silicone or saline. The more heavily textured the surface, the higher the risk. In 2019 the most heavily textured implants were recalled or suspended from supply in Australia.

SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- **Swelling of one breast** that develops a year or more after your surgery, often from fluid building up around the implant
- A **lump** in the breast or armpit
- Pain, firmness, or a change in the shape or size of one breast

Swelling straight after surgery is normal. Late swelling is not, and should be checked with an ultrasound. Most late fluid collections turn out **not** to be BIA-ALCL, but they need testing to be sure.

BIA-ALCL AND BREAST IMPLANT ILLNESS ARE DIFFERENT

BIA-ALCL is a defined cancer with a laboratory test and a clear treatment. Breast implant illness describes whole-body symptoms such as fatigue and brain fog, and has no test and no proven cause. A separate information sheet is available.

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED

1. **Ultrasound** to look for fluid or a lump around the implant.
2. If fluid is present, a sample is taken with a fine needle and **tested in the laboratory**, including for a marker called CD30.
3. If BIA-ALCL is confirmed, scans such as MRI, CT or PET check whether it has spread.

A mammogram checks for breast cancer, but it is not a useful test for BIA-ALCL.

TREATMENT AND OUTLOOK

Most cases are found early, with the abnormal cells only in the fluid around the implant. These are usually **cured by surgery alone**: removing the implant and the whole capsule in one piece (*en bloc capsulectomy*). Both implants are usually removed. If the disease has spread beyond the capsule, chemotherapy or radiotherapy may also be needed, and care is shared with a lymphoma specialist.

SHOULD I HAVE MY IMPLANTS REMOVED AS A PRECAUTION?

No. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and Australian specialist societies do not recommend removing implants that are causing no symptoms, including textured implants. The sensible approach is to know your implants, check your breasts, and act on any change.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR IMPLANTS

- ☐ Get to know how your breasts normally look and feel
- ☐ Check your breasts regularly, including your armpits and up to your collarbone
- ☐ Keep your implant card and operation details somewhere safe
- ☐ Continue your normal breast screening, as advised for your age
- ☐ Have a check-up with your surgeon or GP if anything changes

WHO TO CONTACT

If you notice any of the signs on page 1, contact our rooms on **1300 267 726**. If you have moved away, see your GP and ask for an ultrasound and a referral to a plastic surgeon.

Your implants may also be recorded on the **Australian Breast Device Registry** (1800 998 722), which can help if you are unsure what implants you have.

YOUR IMPLANT RECORD

Date of surgery		Hospital
Manufacturer and model		Surface (smooth / textured)
Size: right	Size: left	Position (over / under muscle)

Sources: NSW Health safety notice (2025); Therapeutic Goods Administration breast implant hub; Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons. More detail: drkumar.com.au/breast-implant-associated-anaplastic-large-cell-lymphoma-sydney