

# BREAST IMPLANT ASSOCIATED CANCER (BIA-ALCL)

Reports about a possible link between certain types of breast implants and a rare form of cancer called *Breast implant associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma* or BIA-ALCL have caused many women who have breast implants to worry. If you are concerned about these reports, this fact sheet may answer many of your questions about BIA-ALCL and help with any decisions about your health and health care.

## What is BIA-ALCL?

BIA-ALCL is a cancer of the immune system that develops in the fluid and scar tissue that forms around breast implants. It is not breast cancer.

Whether you had breast implants inserted for cosmetic reasons or for reconstruction after breast cancer surgery, based on the available data, the risk of developing BIA-ALCL is extremely low. Most cases occur between three and fourteen years after the insertion of an implant, although BIA-ALCL has been reported in patients as early as one year after their implant surgery and as late as 37 years after surgery. Patients with textured breast implants, particularly 'macro-textured' implants, have a higher risk of developing BIA-ALCL.

Due to concerns about BIA-ALCL, the Therapeutic Goods Administration of Australia (TGA) has suspended the use of some types of breast implants in Australia and imposed new regulations on the manufacturers of those still available here.

## What are its signs and symptoms?

The most common sign of BIA-ALCL is a build-up of fluid around the implant. In some cases, it may appear as a lump in the breast or armpit.

If you do experience changes in your breasts after implant surgery, remember, there can be many reasons for this. This is a rare disease and the changes are unlikely to be caused by BIA-ALCL. However, it is important to speak with your doctor if you notice any changes to your breasts.

## How is it diagnosed and treated?

If you develop symptoms that could be caused by BIA-ALCL, your doctor will refer you for an ultrasound. If the ultrasound shows a collection of fluid (often not due to BIA-ALCL), a sample of the fluid may be taken and sent to a laboratory for testing. Other tests such as MRI, CT or PET scans may also be needed to check for any growth of the cancer and to see if it has spread to other parts of the body.

Most cases of BIA-ALCL are detected at an early stage and successfully treated. Treatment is provided by a team which includes blood disease and cancer specialists and breast implant surgeons. In most cases, implants are removed. Some patients may also require chemotherapy, radiotherapy or additional surgery.

## What should I do if I have breast implants but do not have symptoms?

There are a number of things that you can do even if you have no symptoms of BIA-ALCL:

- Get to know the normal look and feel of your breasts. Self-examine your breasts regularly, including your armpits and up to your collarbones. If you see or feel any changes or have any concerns, see your doctor.
- Talk with your surgeon about what monitoring your breasts might need in the long term. This will depend on the type of implants you have and your medical history.

Medical experts do not recommend having your breast implants removed if you have no symptoms of BIA-ALCL, even if the type of implants you have

are no longer available in Australia. This is because the risk of developing BIA-ALCL is lower than the risk of anaesthetic and surgery.

### What should I consider if I am thinking of having breast implants inserted?

No medical device is 100 per cent safe. If you are considering breast implants, you should ask your surgeon about the risks and benefits of the different types of breast implants.

Remember that the risk of BIA-ALCL is extremely low, and that the implants that are linked to a higher risk of this cancer are no longer available in Australia.

#### For more information

##### **Therapeutic Goods Administration of Australia**

[www.tga.gov.au/hubs/breast-implants](http://www.tga.gov.au/hubs/breast-implants)

##### **Australian Breast Device Registry**

[www.abdr.org.au/](http://www.abdr.org.au/)

##### **Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons**

[www.plasticsurgery.org.au/protecting-patient-safety/bia-alcl/](http://www.plasticsurgery.org.au/protecting-patient-safety/bia-alcl/)