

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre

Breast Cancer Program

# Silicone Breast Implants

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## **Silicone Breast Implants**

Silicone implants have been in use since 1962 and produce long-lasting results. Their composition has changed over the years to become the high quality, safe implants that are available today.

They consist of a strong, silicone shell that is filled with silicone gel.

## **What is silicone?**

Silicone is a family of chemical compounds, which depending on how the molecules are arranged can be manufactured into a variety of forms. These include liquid, gel, foam and rubber.

Silicone has many common uses: cosmetics, skin creams, hair products, deodorants, cleaning solvents and food packaging to name but a few.

Silicone has many medical uses also: artificial joints, catheter tubing, heart valves, pacemakers and tendon grafting.

## **Is it safe?**

Silicone has proved non-toxic to the human body during widespread use over an extensive period of time. It also has a high degree of stability and does not change within the human body.

## **Can Silicone implants cause Autoimmune or Connective Tissue Disease?**

An "Independent Review Group" has examined all the evidence and concluded that there is no evidence to support this. (Crown copyright July 1998).

## **Can they cause cancer?**

Large groups of women have been studied, the results of which conclude that there is no risk of cancer with silicone implants.

### **How long do they last?**

Probably 20 – 30 years, (see section headed rupture).

### **Will the implant prevent screening for a recurrence of my cancer?**

Because you have had a mastectomy, you will no longer require screening with mammography on the affected side. Other types of x-rays or scans can still be performed if required. If you have an implant on your non-affected side, this can still be screened with mammography. The implant will not prevent you or your doctor from detecting any problem during examination.

### **What can I expect after the operation?**

Immediately after the operation there will be some swelling which may take several months to settle down. It can also take a few months for the tissues and implant to “drop” into a more natural position. The scars will also need time to fade. Do not expect too much initially.

### **Are there any complications?**

There are a few potential problems:

#### · Capsule formation

This occurs when the implants become surrounded by excessive fibrous scar tissue which then contracts and makes the breast feel hard and sometimes uncomfortable.

This occurs in less than 10% of implants currently in use.

Where there is marked capsule formation, surgery can be performed to remove the capsule. At the same time, the implant is usually replaced.

#### · Rupture

Unless you are unlucky enough to have a violent chest injury, this is very uncommon with the newer implants used today. Because the silicone gel consistency is now thicker or even solid, there is not a sudden loss of shape if the implant ruptures. The fibrous capsule that the body makes around the implant also keeps the silicone contained, so that even if a rupture occurs the silicone should not get into other tissues in the body.

Screening for rupture is available for woman who may have had older style implants inserted (usually before 1990) if they have any concerns, or will be done at any time if a rupture is suspected. An ultrasound scan or MRI scan is usually performed which does not cause any discomfort.

### **What changes should I look out for?**

A change in the shape, contour and outline of your reconstructed breast, or a gradual softening and reduction in size.

### **What if an implant does require changing?**

This is relatively minor operation which involves part of the original scar being opened-up. The capsule of fibrous tissue may also have to be excised in order to remove any silicone that has leaked or to remove excessive capsule formation. If so, the discomfort and recovery time may be more than occurs for insertion of implant only.

### **What should I do if I notice any changes?**

Make an appointment to the Breast cancer program clinic to see your Breast Surgeon tel: 72727350. If you are unsure, or wish to discuss any problems, you can ring the Breast cancer program clinic to make an appointment to see our Breast Care Nurse Specialist at the clinic. Alternatively, you can arrange to speak to her on the telephone for advice.