
Breast implants and mammograms

Summary

- Most women who have breast implants are able to have regular screening mammograms.
 - It is important to tell the BreastScreen clinic if you have implants, as different techniques may be used for the screening mammogram.
 - It is unlikely, but possible, that having a screening mammogram could cause or worsen leaking of silicone or change the shape or texture of the breast.
 - For most women, the benefits of breast screening mammograms will outweigh the risks.
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Breast screening mammograms (breast x-rays) are generally safe for women with breast implants. However, there may be risks. A mammogram might also be less effective in detecting cancer in women with implants because implants can affect how much breast tissue can be seen.

It is important to tell the breast screening clinic if you have implants, as different techniques may be used for your screening mammogram.

Breast implants

Breast implants (also called breast prostheses) are inserted to enlarge or change the shape of the breasts or to reconstruct the breast following surgery. A breast implant has a shell or envelope made of silicone. The shell is filled with either silicone gel or a saline (salt) fluid or a combination of both.

Breast screening

Women aged 50 to 74 are invited to have a free **breast screening** mammogram every two years through the **BreastScreen Australia** program. Having regular screening mammograms (breast x-rays) is the best way to detect breast cancer in its earliest stages.

Some women may feel concerned about being exposed to radiation. Breast mammography uses a very low dose of radiation. For most women, the benefits of regular screening outweigh any possible risk from radiation exposure.

Breast screening can find most breast cancers present at the time of the mammogram but, like many medical tests, it is not 100 per cent effective. The presence, type and position of the implant within the breast affects how much breast tissue can be seen on the mammogram.

If you have implants because you have had treatment for breast cancer, a general breast screening service such as BreastScreen is not the best service for your needs. Discuss your individual circumstances with your doctor.

Breast implants and breast cancer – no evidence

Currently, there is no evidence that breast cancer occurs more often in women who have breast implants than in women without breast implants.

Different screening mammogram procedures

It's important for BreastScreen to know if you have implants. The radiographer who takes your mammogram can then use special techniques to take images of breast tissue that might otherwise be hidden by your implants, as well as using the usual technique. You might find this uncomfortable.

Breast screening for women with breast implants often requires more x-ray films than for women without implants and may involve additional exposure to radiation.

A small risk of damage to the implant

Radiographers take special care to use minimal compression on breast implant during the breast screening procedure. It is highly unlikely that this compression could cause or worsen leaking of silicone or change the shape or texture of the breast, but it is possible.

Detecting breast implant problems

If you have problems with your breast implants, consult your doctor before coming to BreastScreen Victoria. The BreastScreen service does not investigate or diagnose conditions associated with breast implants.

Possible breast implant abnormalities are not always obvious on a screening mammogram. If a possible implant abnormality is incidentally noted, BreastScreen will tell you in your results letter.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Women's health centre
- **BreastScreen Victoria** Tel. **13 20 50**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

BreastScreen Victoria

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