

# Breast Implants & Breast Cancer

**Breast Augmentation** is the most commonly performed cosmetic surgery in the United States. According to data from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 290,224 women underwent cosmetic augmentation in 2013. Another 83,549 women had breast implants placed for reconstruction. About one in eight women will develop breast cancer making it one of the most common cancers for women. So, it is natural to consider any possible relationship between breast implants and breast cancer. The purpose of this article is to offer some general comments and discuss recent studies published in the medical literature. If this is a matter of specific concern for you, you should seek the advice of your physician.

Numerous studies have shown no increased risk for breast cancer in women with breast implants compared to women without implants. A study published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) in 2013 caught the attention of the media because it suggested that women who develop breast cancer after breast implants might be diagnosed at a later stage than women without breast implants<sup>1</sup>. Several studies have looked at this specific issue previously with conflicting results. For breast cancer, the earlier it is diagnosed, the more likely it can be cured. So, any potential delay in diagnosis is undesirable.

The BMJ study does not track any new patients but instead combines data from 12 prior studies using a statistical method called meta-analysis. While this is an established method of epidemiological (population based) research, it has numerous limitations. When added together, the pooled data from the other studies suggests that women with breast implants who did develop cancer might be diagnosed at a slightly later time than those without implants. Since the studies used for the analysis were small, had some limitations, and had conflicting results, the BMJ authors wisely conclude that more studies are needed to make any sort of recommendation. In addition, the BMJ study states that "*cosmetic breast implants are not associated with increased risk of breast cancer.*" This confirms numerous prior studies. Interestingly, one of the same author's previous studies<sup>2</sup> from 2012 showed a decreased overall incidence of breast cancer in women with breast implants.

Women with cosmetic breast implants should use the same screening guidelines for mammograms as those who do not have implants. However, women with breast implants require additional views to see around the implants as completely as possible. The American Cancer Society recommends annual mammograms starting at age 40 for women without increased risk of breast cancer. Regular breast self-exams, and an annual exam by a physician are also recommended. You should consult with your physician to determine if you need more frequent screening than these baseline recommendations.



Breast implant technology has come a long way over time. Both patients seeking cosmetic breast enlargement and patients needing breast reconstruction benefit from the new implants now available. Likewise, our diagnostic ability has improved greatly over the recent past. Digital mammography, MRI and higher resolution ultrasound continue to improve our ability to detect cancers at the earliest possible time.

So, what does this mean for women considering breast implants or those who have already had them? First, rest comfortably knowing there is no increased risk of breast cancer with breast implants. Second, you should follow the breast cancer screening guidelines from the American Cancer Society, or a more aggressive regimen based on your physician's recommendation. Third, if any of these matters are of specific concern for you, seek consultation with a Board Certified Plastic Surgeon.

<sup>1</sup> BMJ. 2013 Apr 29;346:Breast cancer detection and survival among women with cosmetic breast implants: systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. Lavigne E, et al.

<sup>2</sup> Int J Cancer. 2012 Oct 1;131(7):E1148-57. Canadian breast implant cohort: extended follow-up of cancer incidence. Pan SY(1), Lavigne E, et al.

David S. Kirn, M.D., F.A.C.S.  
[www.kirnplasticsurgery.com](http://www.kirnplasticsurgery.com)



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Dr. David Kirn is a Board Certified Plastic Surgeon who is devoted to advanced techniques in Cosmetic Surgery of the Face, Breast, and Body. In private practice since 1998, he is located in a state of the art facility which includes a full service skin care center. The practice is focused on personalized patient care and attention to detail. Where possible, Dr. Kirn utilizes minimally invasive procedures. The goal is to deliver quality clinical results while minimizing patient recovery time. Examples of this include a no-drain tummy tuck, armpit incision breast augmentation with gel or saline implants, fat grafting, and a short scar facelift (the MACS lift). In addition, Dr. Kirn and nurse-injector Carey Sanders, RN offer a full spectrum of non-surgical treatments such as Dysport®, Botox®, Restylane®, Juvederm®, Radiesse®, and laser.