PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Breast Implant-Associated Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (BIA-ALCL)

This information answers some commonly asked questions about breast implant-associated lymphoma (BIA-ALCL).

About BIA-ALCL

Lymphoma is a type of cancer that affects your immune system and your lymph nodes. If you have breast implants, you may have a very low risk of developing a rare type of lymphoma called breast implant-associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma, or BIA-ALCL. This is a rare type of cancer and most people are treated for it and cured.

BIA-ALCL can grow in the skin, lymph nodes, or scar tissue around your implant.

If you or someone you love has breast implants, learning more about the disease can help you feel better prepared if you decide to speak with a doctor. This is a good place to start.

Risk Factors for BIA-ALCL

You can get BIA-ALCL if your breast implants are silicone or saline filled. It happens more often in people who have breast implants that have a textured surface instead of a smooth surface, but your risk of getting BIA-ALCL is still low. You can find out if your implant is textured or smooth by referring to your Breast Implant ID Card. This will show you the implant manufacturer’s website where you can go to find more information. You can also call your doctor’s office.
Signs and Symptoms of BIA-ALCL

It’s important for you to do a breast exam daily to look for any issues with your implants.

It’s also important to schedule follow up appointments with your plastic surgeon regularly. They can check for any signs of BIA-ALCL at these appointments.

The following changes in your breasts or breast implants may be signs of BIA-ALCL. You may have these changes in 1 or both of your breasts.

Talk with your healthcare provider if you have any of the following:

- Fluid around your implant. This can cause your breasts to get larger or feel tighter. This can happen many years after your implant placement surgery.
- Changes in the appearance of your breast. Your breast may be swollen, feel lumpy, or look misshapen.
- Tightness or scarring around your implant.
- Tumors in your breast skin or tissue. This is a less common sign.
- Enlarged lymph nodes in 1 or both of your armpits. This is a less common sign.

These signs don’t always mean that you have BIA-ALCL. Other problems, such as a leaking implant, can also cause these signs. If you have any of these symptoms, make an appointment with your doctor.

Diagnosing BIA-ALCL

You may need an imaging scan such as an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), PET scan (positron emission tomography), or ultrasound to look at the scar tissue and fluid around your implant. Your doctor may also test for BIA-ALCL by taking a sample of your breast tissue, scar tissue around your implant, or the fluid around your implants.
Treatment for BIA-ALCL

Most people with BIA-ALCL can be treated and cured.

The treatment for BIA-ALCL is usually surgery to remove the implant and the scar tissue around it. Most of the time, this is the only treatment people need. Some people may also need chemotherapy or radiation therapy, but this isn’t as common. If you need to have your implants removed, and have questions about breast reconstruction, talk with your doctor.

Other Resources

While not much is known about BIA-ALCL, research is ongoing. If you would like more information, visit the following website, or call the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgical Service consult line at 212-639-5220.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

bit.ly/2W21lLU

This website provides an in-depth overview of what’s currently known about BIA-ALCL.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team. After 5:00 PM, during the weekend, and on holidays, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.