

Ruptured Breast Implants – How, why, and what to do about it

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Breast augmentation is the leading cosmetic surgery in the United States. Data from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons has shown that there were approximately 299,000 breast augmentation procedures performed in 2019 alone.

Basically, breast augmentation is a surgical procedure to improve the appearance and increase the size of the breasts. During surgery, the plastic surgeon places breast implants made of silicone, saline, or other alternatives, beneath the patient's chest muscles and breast tissue.

Patients who had a mastectomy can also get breast implants to improve their post-surgical appearance and make their breasts look natural.

However, breast implants only last from 10 to 20 years before a replacement is needed. There are also cases when implants need to be removed sooner because of complications; one of these is breast implant rupture.

How and why breast implant rupture happens?

Breast implants have an outer covering or shell made of silicone. Saline implants also have a valve, which can leak. The longer you have the implant, the higher the risk of breast implant rupture.

Breast implants may rupture when they have already reached their prescribed lifespan. However, they can also rupture prematurely in the event of direct trauma to the chest, such as during a car accident.

According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), breast implants may also rupture when:

- Compressed during a mammogram procedure
- Punctured by a needle during breast biopsy
- Overfilled or underfilled (for saline implants)
- The patient develops capsular contracture (the breast tissue around the implant hardens following an infection or when blood or fluids pool in the breast after a surgical procedure)

What are the signs and symptoms of ruptured breast implants?

According to our plastic surgery consultant in Miami, all types of breast implants can rupture, but only saline-filled implants can deflate. The signs and symptoms of breast implant rupture depend on the type of implant.

Saline-filled breast implant rupture

When the valve of a saline-filled implant fails, or the implant itself ruptures, the saline solution will immediately leak out. Sometimes, it can take several days before the implant appears deflated. Saline, which is a solution of salt and water, will be absorbed by the body, and the implant will look smaller and lose its original shape.

Silicone Gel-filled breast implant rupture

The consistency of silicone gel is thicker than saline. Therefore, if the outer shell ruptures, it will leak out more slowly. You may not immediately notice a ruptured silicone implant because most patients experience no symptoms at all.

In the majority of cases, a silent rupture may not alter the appearance and feel of your breast, so an MRI is needed to confirm if the implant has indeed ruptured.

In some cases, patients may notice a change in the appearance of the breast, such as a decrease in size, change in shape, and the presence of hard lumps.

Unlike saline, the body does not absorb silicone. It may interact with the surrounding breast tissue and even spread to the lymph nodes, so patients may also experience pain, firmness, tingling, swelling, or a burning sensation in the affected breast.

How to treat or manage a ruptured breast implant?

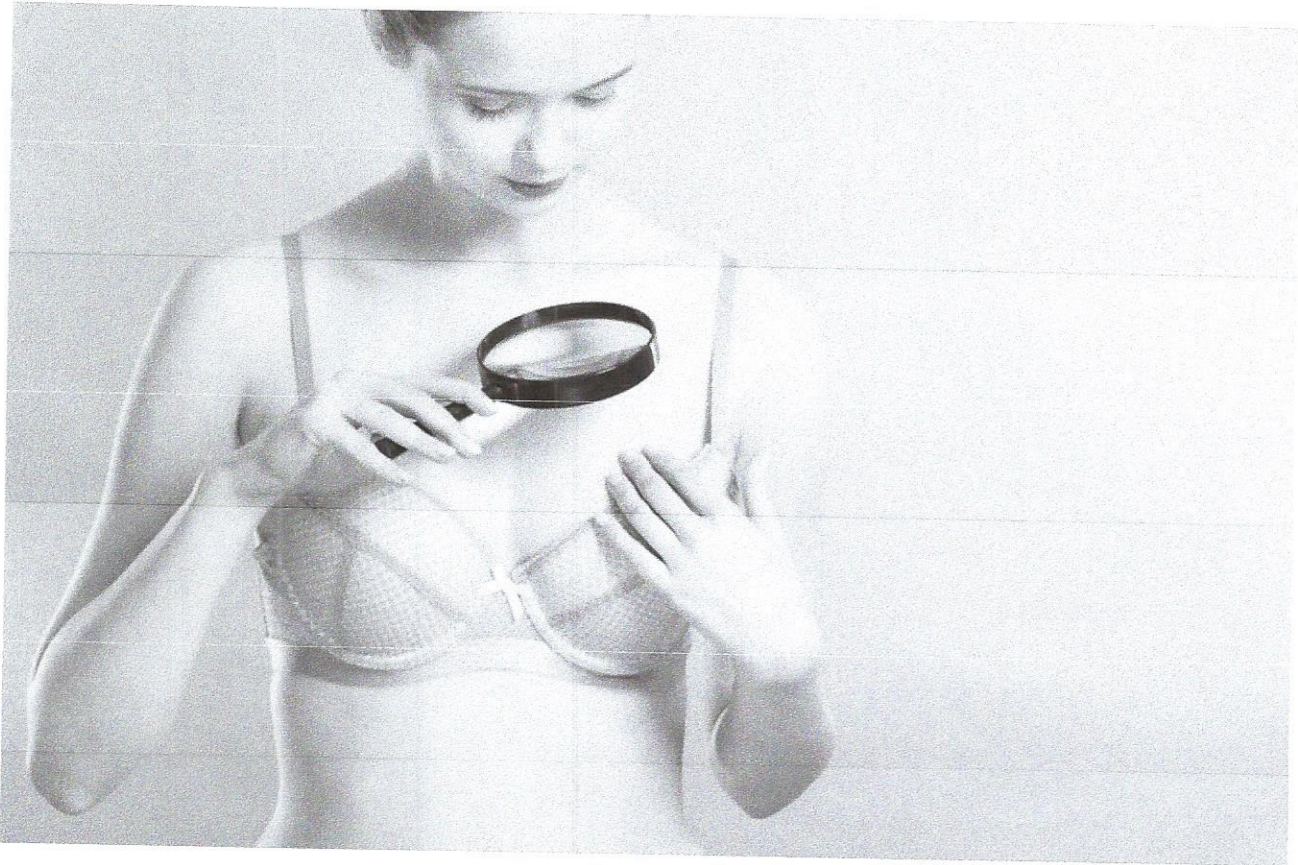
Patients need to undergo some tests to confirm if their implant has indeed ruptured. In saline implants, the loss of volume alone is already a clear indication of a rupture. A ruptured silicone-filled breast implant is more difficult to diagnose, so patients will have to undergo an MRI exam as this is the most sensitive at detecting silicone implant rupture.

Saline-filled breast implant rupture management

The plastic surgeon will remove the empty shell of the ruptured implant. It can be replaced with a new breast implant, depending on the patient's preference.

Silicone-filled breast implant rupture management

A ruptured silicone implant must be removed as well, as it may interact with the breast tissues and even spread to the lymph nodes. The plastic surgeon will also clean the area of silicone. Depending on the extent of damage, some patients will need several surgeries, and the implant replacement may be delayed.



Where to find a plastic surgery consultant in Miami?

If you are experiencing any of the signs and symptoms of a ruptured breast implant, you can schedule an appointment with Dr. Thomas Zaydon. He will perform a thorough physical assessment and, if necessary, run a few tests to diagnose your condition. Once a diagnosis has been established, he will discuss your treatment options with you.

Be ready to answer the following questions:

- When did you get the implant?
- What type of implant do you have?
- When did the symptoms begin?
- Have you experienced any fever or chills?

A physical examination is necessary to gather important information, which will help your doctor in accurately diagnosing your condition. These data may include:

- Breast shape
- Breast symmetry
- The presence of breast mass or lumps
- The texture of the implant in the affected breast, compared to the implant in the other breast
- Changes in skin appearance in the affected breast, compared to the other breast
- The presence of enlarged lymph nodes in the area near the breast (such as the armpit)
- The presence of nipple discharge

Learn more about Dr. Zaydon – Plastic Surgery Institute of Miami

Dr. Zaydon is certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and is a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

He is also a fellow of the American College of Surgeons. Dr. Zaydon serves as a workers compensation plastic surgeon and an expert witness plastic surgeon on liability cases around the country. He has reviewed many cases and has served as an expert witness for both plaintiff and defendant.

For inquiries, Contact Us.

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