

ALCL: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ANAPLASTIC LARGE CELL LYMPHOMA

What is a lymphoma?

It is a cancer of the lymphatic system.

What is anaplastic large cell lymphoma?

Anaplastic large cell lymphoma is an extremely rare type of lymphoma that develops in the scar tissue around breast implants. It is a lymphoma and has no connection with breast cancer. This condition has been known and studied for the last 10 years. To this day, there are 600 diagnosed cases worldwide, all of them associated with textured implants.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms generally start manifesting six to eight years after surgery. The first sign of ALCL is swelling in the breasts. Patients will note a spontaneous increase in breast size caused by the appearance of fluid around the implant and/or palpable masses or ganglions in the armpit. The swelling is clearly visible and changes in breast firmness may also be noted. Patients should also be on the lookout for masses or lumps.

Can ALCL be cured?

Once diagnosed, these non-aggressive lymphomas have a very high cure rate and bear no relation to regular breast cancer. To this day, there are 27 diagnosed cases in Canada. Only one case was diagnosed in Quebec, and the patient was treated successfully. The risk has been assessed at 1 in 30,000 women with saline or silicone breast implants. If diagnosed in its early stages, ALCL is treated through removal of the internal scar tissue (capsulectomy). This is not to be confused with mastectomies performed to treat breast cancer. A new implant can be inserted during the capsulectomy. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy are only recommended for advanced cases.

I have breast implants – what should I do?

First, check if you have textured implants. If you are not experiencing any of the above-mentioned symptoms, you do not need to do anything. Health Canada and the FDA (Food and Drugs Administration) do not recommend any special testing or surgeries to remove the implants.

If, however, you have saline or silicone breast implants, particularly textured ones, and notice a sudden increase in the size of one or both breasts, you can reach out to your surgeon anytime for a preemptive assessment and, eventually, an ultrasound and a puncture for analysis.

My surgeon retired – how do I find my medical record?

If your operation was conducted at a hospital, you can contact the hospital's archives. If your operation was conducted at a private clinic that has since closed, you can contact the Collège des médecins du Québec (514-933-4441 or www.cmq.org) to know which plastic surgeon your file was transferred to.

The Association des spécialistes en chirurgie plastique et esthétique du Québec is closely monitoring any developments, and plastic surgeons in Quebec are well-informed and trained to recognize and diagnose this type of pathology.