

Breast health after implants

I often see patients who've previously undergone breast augmentation, and a common question arises: "Do I need to have implants replaced, and if so, when?" The answer: It depends.

There are many types of implants — some saline, some silicone, and some with different shapes and characteristics. Some of these implants are no longer made, while others are new and improved.

Currently, there are two main manufacturers: Mentor and Allergan/Natrelle. Each has its own lifetime warranty against defects, ruptures or deflations, as well as a policy regarding insurance for a period of time (typically 10 years). This means that if you have a breast implant that deflates or ruptures, then the implant can be replaced at no charge by the manufacturer.

It's important to talk with a surgeon for specific details on your particular surgery. The total cost generally is based upon the surgeon's fee, cost of the implants, and an office or anesthesia fee. As part of a warranty, the implant manufacturer might offer financial assistance for these additional fees. Patients also can purchase additional coverage at the time of surgery that provides additional financial assistance, as well as lifetime product replacement of the implants for a certain time period (also typically 10 years).

If you've had implants for more than a decade and would like the assurance of financial assistance if one ruptures, then you might want to have them replaced. The longer the implant exists in the body, the higher the risk for rupture. Implants still carry a replacement warranty after the 10-year mark; however, you won't qualify for financial assistance to cover the surgeon's fee.

If you're unhappy with the way your breasts have changed over the years, then schedule a consultation with a cosmetic surgeon to explore your options, which might involve replacing implants or getting a breast lift. In general, an easier recovery time comes with a secondary breast surgery.

On the other hand, if you're happy with the way your breasts look and feel — even if it's been 10 years or longer — then it's not necessary to have implants removed. However, good breast health is recommended, which includes self exams, feeling for firmness or lumps, and getting regular mammograms.

If you're unsure, then make a consultation with a cosmetic surgeon to discuss your options and the specifics of your implant warranty.

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Practice solid dental health for your bones

When it comes to dental health, women already are more prone to develop periodontal disease due to lifelong hormonal fluctuations that affect blood supply to the gums.

They're also prone to develop osteoporosis after age 40. But what does this have to do with dental health? A lot, if your doctor prescribes bisphosphonates to treat bone loss. Bisphosphonates, which are found in prescriptions such as Fosamax, Boniva, and Actonel, are linked to osteonecrosis of the jaw, which essentially is the death of bone tissue. In such cases, the bone is unable to heal after a tooth extraction.

Current information from the American Dental Association (ADA) indicates that bisphosphonate uptake is higher when administered intravenously, such as when it's used to decrease bone pain in cancer patients. In this case, it's best to discuss the risk vs. benefits with the prescribing doctor.

The causes of bone loss include a failure to build adequate bone during the first 30 years of life, having a diet insufficient in calcium and failure to perform regular weight-bearing exercises. For women, add a decrease in estrogen levels during menopause to the list of bone-thinning culprits.

In addition to maintaining good oral home care and getting regular professional cleanings and exams to prevent and treat periodontal disease, which can lead to tooth loss, it's important to take a proactive stance and incorporate weight-bearing exercises. This can be as easy as using inexpensive rubber-coated dumbbells, wrist and ankle weights, and resistance bands at home. Push-ups and pull-ups also are great weight-bearing exercises.

Remember that bone, like muscle, is living tissue. Running and swimming are excellent for cardiovascular strength, but these activities alone are not weight-bearing in nature.

For excellent oral and bone health, it's also best to cut back on soft drinks, including diet soda. Phosphoric acid in soft drinks has been linked to excessive calcium excretion, which also leads to thinner bones.

It might be difficult to believe that exercise affects dental health, but when it comes to the human body, all systems are related.

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