



Breast Implant Illness (BII) Update statement from President of BAAPS, Marc Pacifico.

“Breast implant illness (BII) is an umbrella term that has been used by some women who have breast implants to describe a wide array of systemic (affecting their whole body rather than a single body part) symptoms experienced by them. The symptoms frequently include tiredness, joint ache, brain fog, memory loss and headaches but many other symptoms have also been described.

The WHO (World Health Organisation) does not recognise “BII” as a medical diagnosis as it has not fulfilled the criteria to be classified as a disease. No scientific link between breast implants and these symptoms has yet been identified, however, many women who identify as having these symptoms experience varying degrees of relief after their implants are removed.

A huge amount of research has been done on this, and most notably, in the last few months 3 incredibly high level and well-designed research studies* have been published on this topic.

These studies investigated three specific areas that women who identified as having symptoms associated with their breast implants have described as being important, and possibly the root cause of their symptoms.

In summary, the studies looked at (A) whether the technique in which the breast implant capsule (surrounding scar tissue) was removed made a difference to the relief of their symptoms (there is a strong drive to get surgeons to remove the implant totally within the surrounding capsule, referred to colloquially as “en bloc” (total intact capsulectomy is a more correct term as a true en-bloc capsulectomy is an oncological (cancer) resection of the capsule along with a margin of surrounding breast tissue), as opposed to other safer techniques with lower morbidity (consequences and complications) for patients); (B) whether there were any underlying bacteria or other infections identified that might be contributing to their symptoms, and finally, (C) whether any heavy metals could be identified in the patients that might explain their symptoms (heavy metal poisoning is often blamed for breast implant illness).

The findings from all three studies were that there was (A) no difference in relief of symptoms between different capsule removal techniques (i.e. “en bloc” removal made no difference to symptom relief when compared with other techniques); (B) there were no infectious causes identified and (C) the only variations in heavy metal detection (that were all well below potential toxicological and even acceptable exposure levels) could be explained by being higher in women who had tattoos, were smokers and had dietary habits that increased heavy metal intake (i.e. there was no evidence of heavy metal poisoning).

The symptoms experienced by these women are very real, but we have no medical explanation for the cause of these symptoms, and their symptoms have not been scientifically linked to their implants. It is always hard to prove a negative, but it is likely that some women who identify as having these symptoms have other reasons for them.



My main advice is that firstly if you have implants and experience any symptoms (such as tiredness, joint ache, brain fog, memory loss etc), please do not first assume they are related to your implants. It is crucial that you see your GP to exclude other medical causes, that could range from medical diseases, infections, menopausal reasons or a host of other reasons that need to be excluded first. Secondly if undergoing implant checks, ensure that you are seeing an appropriately qualified surgeon on the GMC specialist register in either plastic surgery or general surgery with a special interest in breast surgery. Finally, you should be aware that there is no scientific evidence to support the benefit of undergoing the riskier so-called “en-bloc” capsulectomy (total intact capsulectomy) compared to other capsulectomy techniques when it comes to relieving systemic symptoms thought to be linked to breast implants or BII. This should not be presented to you as the only possible solution to your symptoms.”

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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9208825/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9400612/>

<https://academic.oup.com/asj/advance-article/doi/10.1093/asj/sjac225/6671500?login=false>

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