

# The Myth of New and Improved

by Kathleen Nye  
Philadelphia Daily News, 03 December 2003

IS IT POSSIBLE that silicone breast implants will be back on the market, despite billions of dollars in legal settlements? Some experts claim that the "new and improved" implants are safer than the old ones. I know from personal experience that this claim is more likely to be myth than reality.

I first received implants in 1968 when I was 22 and had a double mastectomy. After only six months, the devices started to get hard in my body. In 1976, I found a doctor who agreed to remove the implants and replace them. The replacements also hardened and had to be removed in 1981. The doctor then told me there was a new and improved silicone implant that had a thinner, more natural gel that wouldn't harden.

I had the new implant inserted in January 1981. A month later, my left implant had to be removed and replaced again.

After about six months, the problems resumed. I didn't want more surgery, so I waited for two years - until I couldn't stand the pain any longer - to have them removed.

This time, I told the plastic surgeon I wanted my implants taken out but not replaced. He didn't think this was a good idea. For the second time, I was told that a new and improved silicone implant was on the market. So, in January 1983 I got my second "new and improved" implants.

I soon started to feel lumps around the edge of the new implant. There were three foreign masses on the right side. The cancer was sandwiched between two masses of "foreign material," with giant cells.

This was only the beginning of my health disasters associated with implants. I had a total of 13, including devices made by a company called McGhan, now a division of Inamed - the company trying to get their silicone gel implants approved by the FDA.

In the early 1990s, the implant came through my skin and popped out on its own. By 1992, after having a hole in my chest for years that would not heal, I had to have a complicated surgery using my own tissue to replace my lost breasts.

Symptoms of fatigue and joint pain that started a few years after getting implants are still with me, and I have been on disability since 1986. I have been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, abnormal liver function, depression and early Parkinson's disease, among other things.

After all I've been through, imagine what I think when I hear a company promoting another new and improved silicone breast implant. Talk is cheap. Manufacturers can say all they want about their implants being new and improved, but you won't really know if it is better until it has been inside a woman's body for 5, 10 or 15 years.

I know my many surgeries are not unusual. The company's own research showed that 46 percent of breast-cancer patients needed at least one additional surgery within three years of getting implants. The company never even studied how many surgeries women are likely to have after 10 or 20 years. I urge women reading this not to be as naïve as I was when I was told the new implants were better than the old ones.

If a company claims their implants are safe, they should be willing to do the studies necessary to prove it. Unfortunately, that hasn't happened. In fact, most of the research that has been done seems to have been designed to prove that implants are "safe enough" by studying relatively few women for only a few years.

The main concerns about these implants are that they leak inside the body, but that usually happens after 10 years or more. The FDA should not approve any silicone breast implants until they have been tested for a long enough time to prove that they really are safe, and to provide accurate information about any risks.

If you've ever bought a product that wasn't quite as wonderful as described, you know how great the difference can be between myth and reality. It's time for solid safety research to be done - before subjecting a million more women to another mass breast implant experiment. \*

*Kathleen Nye lives in Sinking Spring, Pa.*