

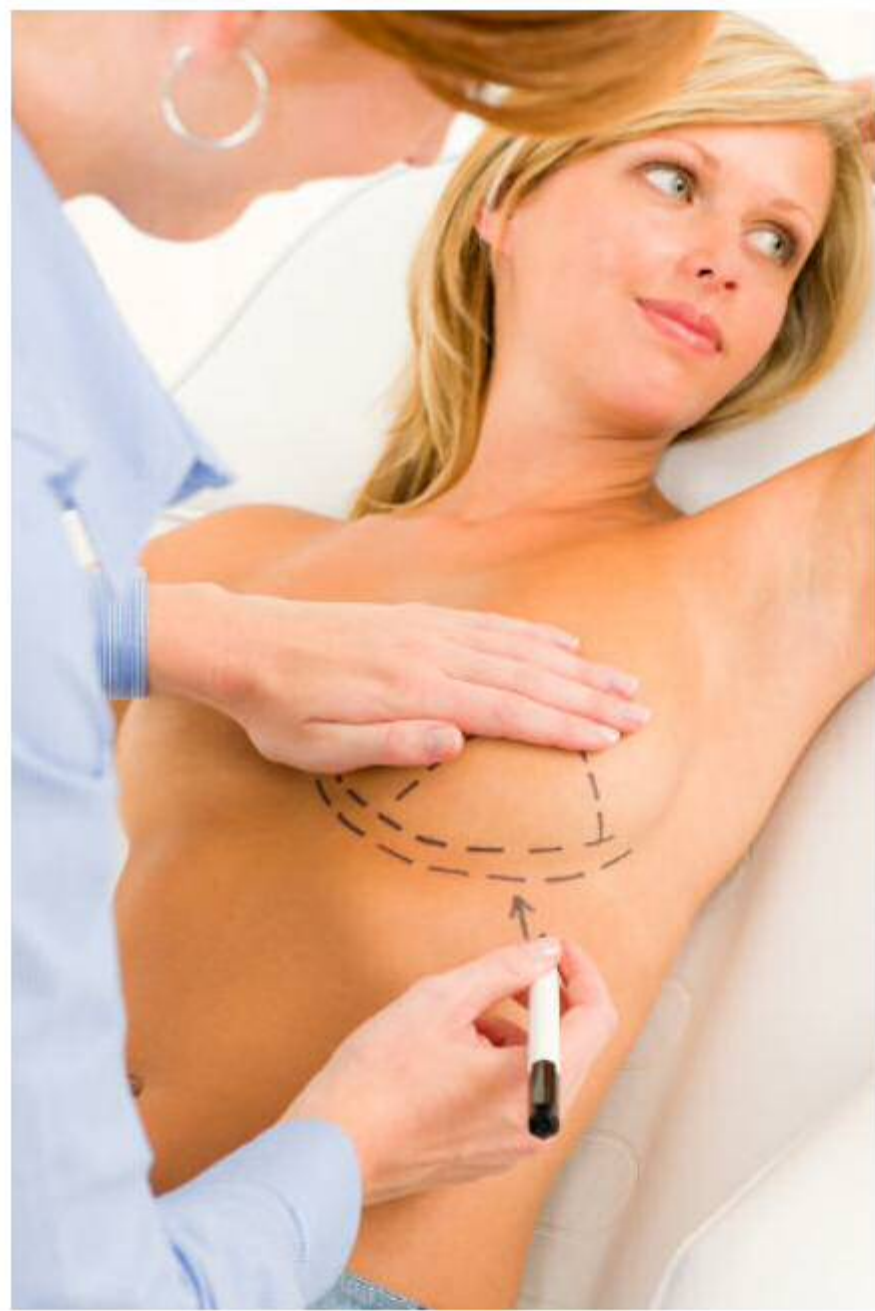
Breast implants still popular after half a century 6

First procedure performed on dog in 1962



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(Fotolia)

The first living thing to receive a breast implant had fur and four legs. Since that procedure, done on Esmerelda, a dog in Texas in 1962, somewhere between five and ten million women have had implants worldwide. According to the latest statistics from the American Society for Aesthetic and Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), breast augmentation now leads the list for cosmetic surgery procedures.

Like several plastic surgeons who commemorated breast implants' half-century, Mississauga, Ontario's Dr. Hugh McLean had a birthday party. "We decided to have an event more or less to give back rather than to acquire," he said, following a press release last fall titled "They're bouncy, they're beautiful and they are having a birthday." A couple of hundred people attended to hear information on breast implants, sexuality and nutrition – monies raised went to a women's health centre.

Dr. McLean believes there is definitely something to celebrate when you consider that in their 50 years, breast implants have survived and even thrived amid controversy. Not only are they one of only a few medical devices to have lasted that long, but they've also gone from okay to not okay to better than okay, judging by the

45% increase in breast augmentation procedures since 2000.

Implants are now considered the most studied of medical devices, says Dr. McLean. Of course, a lot of the monitoring happened when it was discovered that older silicone implants leaked, causing women to claim fibromyalgia and other autoimmune disturbances.

Health Canada approved a newer gel implant in 2006, says Dr. Peter Bray, a Toronto plastic surgeon who adds that in his practice 95% of his breast augmentation patients prefer the new gels over saline, the type of implant used after a 1992 moratorium was declared on the ones that could leak.

The new ones even sound user-friendly: "Gummy bears," says Dr. Bray. "These are more formally known as highly-cohesive, 'form-stable' implants." When cut in half, they remain stable, just like the candy.

Of course leakage isn't the only problem with implants. Complications of surgery can include a painful hardening of the tissue around the implant. Some studies have shown that up to a quarter of women need re-do surgeries to correct size or surgical complications. And they don't last forever. According to www.canadaba.ca, costs run between \$5,000 and \$10,000 depending on the device and surgery.

Women are now having implants for a slew of reasons – from building confidence to looking robust and healthy. And if size doesn't matter as much as it used to, shape and feel does. The latter is probably what attracts older women who seek what Dr. Bray calls a restoration of "some of their pre-baby size and fullness."

But not everyone's a fan of implants. Celebrities such as Sharon Osbourne, Mariel Hemingway and Victoria Beckham have all admitted to getting rid of theirs, and personal stories of "explants" abound on sites such as www.goodbyeimplants.com.

Can breast implants make you sexier? "I think sexiness comes from within," actress Sophia Loren said long ago. "It is something that is in you or isn't and it doesn't have much to do with breasts or thighs or the pout of your lips."

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From boom to bust

- In the 1890's paraffin was injected
- In the 1900's sponges, ivory and ox cartilage were inserted
- In the 1960's the silicone breast implant was invented, then one made from saline
- In the late 80's concern was raised about silicone leaks and a moratorium on them began 1992
- In 2006 a new stable silicone implant was introduced